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Bread-and-Cheese and Kisses.

BY B. L. FARJEON.

With a sense of infinite thankfulness upon me, I sit down to commence my Christmas story. This thankfulness is born of overflowing gratitude. I am grateful that I am spared to write it, and grateful because of the belief that the Blade o' Grass I put forth a year ago, was out of the goodness of many sympathizing hearts, not allowed to wither and die. It has been pressed upon me, and I have had it in my mind, to continue the history of the humble Blade o' Grass that I left drooping last year; but the social events that have occurred between that time and the present would not justify my doing so now. I hope to continue it before long. By and by, please God, you and I will follow the Blade o' Grass through a summer all the more pleasant because of the bleak winter in which it sprung, and by which it has hitherto been surrounded. In the meantime the tears that I shed over it will keep it green I trust. And in the meantime it gladdens me to see a star shining upon it, although it stands amid snow and wintry weather.

As I sit in my quiet chamber and think of the happy season for which I am writing, I seem to hear the music of its tender influence, and I wish that the kindly spirit which animates that day would animate not that day alone, but every day of the three hundred and sixty-five. It might be so; it could be so. Then, indeed, the good time which now is always coming would no longer be looked forward to.

Not that life should be a holiday; work is its wholesome food. But some little more of general kindness toward one another, of generous feeling between class and class, as well as between person and person; some little less consideration of self; some more general recognition by the high of the human and divine equality which the low bear to them; some little more consideration from the poor for the rich; some little more practical pity from the rich for the poor; some little less of the hypocrisy of life too commonly toadied to; some better meaning in the saying of prayers, and therefore more true devotion in the bending of knees; some little more benevolence in statesmanship; some hearty honest practising of doing unto others even as ye would others should do unto you—may well be wished for, more appropriately, perhaps, at this season than any other, associated as it is with all that is tender and bright and good. Why does the strain in which I am writing bring to me the memory of my mother? It is, I suppose, because that memory is the most sacred and the tenderest that I have, and because what I feel for her is interwoven in my heart of hearts.

But there is another reason. From her comes the title of my Christmas story. And this introduction serves in part as a dedication of the beautiful goodness of her nature.

I think that in this wide world, among the thousands of millions of people who live and have passed away, there is not, and never was, a woman who lived her life more contentedly, nor one who strove more heartfully to make the most cheerful use of everything that fell to her lot—of even adversity, of which she had her full share. She was beloved by all who knew her. To her sympathizing heart were confided many griefs which others had to bear; and, poor as she was for a long period of her life, she always by some wonderful secret, of which I hope she was not the only possessor, contrived to help those who came to her in need. I remember asking her once how she managed it. "My dear," she answered, with a smile which reminds me of a peaceful moonlight night—"my dear, I have a lucky bag." Where she kept it, heaven only knows; but she was continually dipping her hand into it, and something good and sweet always came out. How many hearts she cheered, how many burdens she lightened, how many crosses she garlanded with hope, no one can tell. She never did. These things came to her as among the duties of life, and she took pleasure in performing them. I am filled with wonder and with worship as I think how naturally she laid aside her own hard trials to sympathize with the trials of others.

She was a capital housewife, and made much out of little. She had not one selfish desire, and being devoted to her children, she made their home bright for them. There was no sunshine in the house when mother was away. She possessed wonderful secrets in cookery, and I would sooner sit down to one of the dinners she used to prepare for us (albeit they were very humble) than to the grandest banquet that could be placed before me. Everything was sweet that came from her hands—as sweet as was everything that came from her lips.

I would ask her often, being of an inquisitive turn of mind: "Mother, what have you got for dinner to-day?" "Bread-and-Cheese and Kisses," she would reply, merrily. Then I knew that one of her favorite dishes was sure to be on the table, and I rejoiced accordingly. Sometimes, however, she would vary her reply by saying that dinner would consist of "Knobs of Chairs and Pump-Handles."

But Knobs of Chairs and Pump-Handles was the exception. Bread-and-Cheese and Kisses was the rule. And to this day Bread-and-Cheese and Kisses bears for me in its simple utterance a sacred and beautiful meaning. It means contentment; it means cheerfulness; it means the exercise of sweet words and gentle thought; it means home!

Dear and sacred word! Let us away from the garish light that distorts it. Let you and I this Christmas retire for a while to think of it and muse upon it. Let us resolve to cherish it always, and let us unite in the hope that its influence may not be lost in the turmoil of the great march to the thunderous steps of which the world's heart is wildly beating. Home! It is earth's heaven! The flowers that grow within the garret walls prove it; the wondering ecstasy that fills the mother's breast as she looks upon the face of her first-born, the quiet ministering to those we love, the unselfishness, the devotion, the tender word, the act of charity, the self-sacrifice that finds creation there, prove it; the prayers that are said as we kneel by the bedside before committing our bodies to sleep, the little hands folded in worship, the lisping words of praise and thanks to God that come from children's lips, the teaching of those words by the happy mother, so that her child may grow up good, prove it. No lot in this life is too lowly for the pure enjoyment of Bread-and-Cheese and Kisses.

I wish you, dear readers and friends, no better lot than this. May Bread-and-Cheese and Kisses often be your fare, and may it leave as sweet a taste in your mouth as it has left in mine.



SHE TOOK THE REMAINS OF A LOAF AND CUTTING THE BREAD, PRESSED HIM TO EAT.

PART I.—CHAPTER I.

COME AND SHOW YOUR FACE LIKE A MAN.

If I were asked to point to a space of ground which of all other spaces in the world most truly represents the good and the bad, the high and low of humanity, I should unhesitatingly describe a circle of a mile around Westminster Abbey. Within that space is contained all that ennobles life and all that debases it, and within that space, at the same moment, the lofty aspiration of the statesman, pulses in the great Senate House in unison with the degraded desires of the inhabitant of Old Pye Street. There St. Giles and St. James elbow each other. There may be seen, in one swift, comprehensive glance, all the beauty and ugliness of life, all its hopes and hopelessness, all its vanity and modesty, its knowledge and ignorance, all its piety and profanity, all its fragrance and foulness. The wisdom of ages, the nobility that sprung from fortunate circumstances or from brave endeavor, the sublime lessons that lie in faith and heroism, sanctify the solemn aisles of the grand old Abbey. Within its sacred cloisters rest the ashes of the great; outside its walls, brushing them with his ragged garments, skulks the thief—and worse.

But not with these contrasts, nor with any lesson that they may teach, have you and I to deal now. Our attention is fixed upon the striking of eight o'clock by the sonorous tongue of Westminster. And not our attention alone—for many of the friends with whom we shall presently shake hands are listening also; so that we find ourselves suddenly plunged into very various company. Ben Sparrow, the old grocer, who just as One tolls, is weighing out a quarter of a pound of brown sugar for a young urchin without a cap, inclines his head and listens, for all the world as if he were a sparrow, so birdlike is the movement. Bessie Sparrow, his granddaughter, who, having put Tottie to bed, is coming down stairs in the dark (she has left the candle in the wash-hand

basin in Tottie's room, for Tottie cannot go to sleep without a light), stops and counts from one to eight, and thinks the while, with eyes that have tears in them, of somebody who at that moment is thinking of her. Tottie, with one acid-drop very nearly at the point of dissolution in her mouth, and with another perspiring in her hand, lies in bed and listens, and forgets to suck until the sound dies quite away. A patient-looking woman, pausing in the contemplation of a great crisis in her life, seeks to find in the tolling of the bell some assurance of a happy result. James Million, Member of Parliament, whose name, as he is a very rich man, may be said to be multitudinous, listens also as he rolls by in his cab; and as his cab passes the end of the street in which Mrs. Naldret resides, that worthy woman, who is standing on a chair before an open cupboard, follows the sound, with the tablecloth in her hand, and mutely counts one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, the last number being accompanied by a resigned sigh, as if eight were the end of all things.

The room in which Mrs. Naldret is standing is poor and comfortable; a cheerful fire is burning, and the kettle is making up its mind to begin to sing. An old black cat is lazily blinking her eyes at the little jets of gas that thrust their forked tongues from between the bars of the stove. This cat is lying on a faded hearth-rug, in which once upon a time a rampant lion reigned in brilliant colors; and she is not at all disturbed by the thought that a cat lying full-length upon a lion, with his tongue hanging out, is an anomaly in nature and a parody in art. There is certainly some excuse for her in the circumstance that the lion is very old, and is almost entirely rubbed out.

Mrs. Naldret steps from the chair with the tablecloth in her hand, and in one clever shake, and with as nimble a movement as any wizard could have made, shakes it open. As it forms a balloon over the table, she assists it to expel the wind and to settle down comfortably—being herself of a comfortable turn of mind—and smooths the creases with her palms until the cloth fits the table like wax. Then she sets the tea things, scolds the teapot, and begins to cut the bread and to butter it. She cuts the bread very thick and butters it very thin. Butter is like fine gold to poor people.

"I don't remember," she says, pausing to make the reflection, with the knife in the middle of the loaf, "its being so cold for a long time. To be sure, we're in December, and it'll be Christmas in three weeks. Christmas!" she repeats, with a sigh, "and George'll not be here. He'll be on the sea—on the stormy ocean. It'll be a heavy Christmas to us. But there! perhaps it's all for the best; though how George got the idea of emigrating into his head, I can't tell. It seemed to come all of a sudden like. The house won't seem like the same when he's away." For comfort her thoughts turn in another direction—toward her husband. "I wish father was home, though it isn't quite his time—and he's pretty punctual, is father." She goes to the window, and peeps at the sky through a chink in the shutters. "It looks as if it was going to snow. What a bright clear night it is, but how cold. It's freezing hard." Turning, she looks at the fire and at the cosy room gratefully. "Thank God, we've got a fire and a roof to cover us! God help those who haven't! There are a great many of 'em, poor creatures, and times are hard." She turns again to the window to take another peep at the sky through the shutters and finds the light shut out. "There's some one looking into the room!" she exclaims, retreating hastily out of view. "It can't be Jim—he's never done such a thing. He's only too glad to get indoors such nights as this. And it can't be George. And there's the lock of the street door broken—no more use than a teapot with a hole in the bottom." Being a woman of courage, Mrs. Naldret runs into the passage and opens the street door.

"Who's there?" she cries, looking into the street, and shivering, as the cold wind blows into her face. "Who's there? Don't sneak away like that, but come and show your face like a man!"

The man pauses at the challenge, stands irresolute for a moment or two, then walks slowly back to the window with hanging head.

"Show my face like a man!" he repeats, sadly, bitterly, and with a world of self-reproach in his tone. "There's not much of that stuff left in me, Mrs. Naldret."

"Good Lord!" she exclaims, as he stands before her like a criminal. "It's Saul Fielding!"

"Yes," he replies. "It's Saul Fielding, God help him!"

"Why can't Saul Fielding help himself?" she retorts, half angrily, half pityingly. "There was stuff enough in him once—at all events, I thought so."

"Show me the way!" he cries; but lowers his tone instantly, and says, humbly: "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Naldret, for speaking in that manner. It's ungrateful of me to speak like that to any of George's friends, and least of all to his mother, that George loves like the apple of his eye."

"So he does, dear lad," says the grateful woman, "and it does my heart good to hear you say so. But you've nothing to be grateful to me for, Saul. I've never done you any good; it's never been in my power."

"Yes, you have, and it has been in your power, Mrs. Naldret. Why, it was only last week that you offered me—"

"What you wouldn't take," she interrupts, hastily: "so you don't know if I meant it. Let be! Let be!"

"That you offered me food," he continues, steadily. "But it's like you and yours to make light of it. You've never done me any good. Why, you're George's mother, and you brought him into the world. And I owe him more than my life—ay, more than my life."

"I know the friendship there was between you and George," she says, setting the strength of his words to that account, "and that George loved you like a brother. More's the pity, because of that, that you are as you are."

"It is so," he assents, meekly; "but the milk's spilled. I can't pick it up again."

"Saul, Saul! you talk like a woman!"

"Do I?" he asks, tenderly, and looking into her face with respect and esteem in his eyes. "Then there's some good left in me. I know one who is stronger than I am, better, wiser than a hundred such as I—and I showed my appreciation of her goodness and her worth by doing her wrong. Show my face like a man! I ought to hide it, as the moles do, and show my contempt for myself by flying from the sight of men!"

Filled with compassion, she turns her face from him, so that she may not witness his grief.

"She is the noblest, the best of women!" he continues. "In the face of God, I say it. Standing here, with His light shining upon me, with His keen wind piercing me to my bones (but it is just!), I bow to her, although I see her not, as the nearest approach to perfect goodness which it has ever been my happiness and my unhappiness to come in contact with. Ay! although virtue, as humanly exercised, would turn its back upon her."

"Are you blaming the world, Saul Fielding," she asks, in a tone that has a touch of sternness in it, "for a fault which is all your own?"

"No," he answers; "I am justifying Jane. I blame the world! A pretty object I, to turn accuser!"

He appeals to his rags, in scorn of them and of himself.

"Saul Fielding," she says, after a pause, during which she feels nothing but ruth for his misery, "you are a bit of a scholar; you have gifts that others could turn to account, if they had them. Before you—you—"

"Went wrong," as she hesitates. "I know what you want to say. Go on, Mrs. Naldret. Your words don't hurt me."

"Before that time George used to come home full of admiration for you and your gifts. He said that you were the best-read man in all the trade; and I'm sure, to hear you speak is proof enough of that. Well, let be, Saul; let the past die, and make up your mind, like a man, to do better in the future."

"Let the past die!" he repeats, as through the clouds that darken his mind rifts of human love shine, under the influence of which his voice grows indescribably soft and tender. "Let the past die! No, not for a world of worlds. Though it is filled with shame, I would not let it go. What are you looking for?"

"It's Jim's time—my husband's—for coming home," she says, a little anxiously, looking up the street. "He mightn't like"—But again she hesitates and stumbles over her words.

"To see you talking to me. He shall not. My eyes are better than his, and the moment I see him turn the corner of the street I will go."

"What were you looking through the shutters for?"

"I wanted to see if George was at home."

"And supposing he had been?"

"I should have waited in the street until he came out."

"Do you think Jim Naldret would like to see his son talking to Saul Fielding?"

"No, I don't suppose he would," he replies, quietly; "but for all that, I shall do George no harm. I would lay down my life to serve him. You don't know what binds me and George together. And he is going away soon—how soon Mrs. Naldret?"

"In a very few days," she answers, with a sob in her throat.

"God speed him! Ask him to see me before he goes, will you, Mrs. Naldret?"

"Yes, I will, Saul; and thank you a thousand times for the good feeling you show to him."

"Tell him that I have joined the waits, and that he will hear my flute among them any night this week. I'll manage so that we don't go away from this neighborhood till he bids good-by to it."

"Joined the waits!" she exclaims. "Good Lord! Have you come to that?"

"That's pretty low, isn't it?" he says, with a light laugh, and with a dash of satire in his tone. "But then, you know—playing the flute—is one of my gifts (I learned it myself when I was a boy)—and it's the only thing I can get to do. Is there any tune you're very fond of, and would like to hear as you lie abed? If there is, we'll play it."

"If you could play a tune to keep George at home," says Mrs. Naldret, "that's the tune I'd like to hear."

"Your old Gospel of contentment, Mrs. Naldret," he remarks.

"I like to let well alone," she replies, with emphatic nods; "if you'd been content with that, years ago, instead of trying to stir men up"—

"I shouldn't be as I am now," he says, interrupting her; "you are right—you are right. Good night, and God bless you!"

He shuffles off without waiting for another word, blowing on his fingers, which are almost frozen. Mrs. Naldret, who is also cold enough by this time, is glad to get to her fireside to warm herself. Her thoughts follow Saul Fielding. "Poor fellow," she muses. "I should like to have had him by the fire for a while, but Jim would have been angry. And, to be sure, it wouldn't be right, with the life he's been leading. What'll be the end of him goodness only knows. He's made me feel quite soft. And he loves George! That's what makes me like him. 'You don't know what binds me and George together,' he said. 'I would lay down my life to serve him,' he said. Well, there must be some good in a man who speaks like that!"

CHAPTER II.

AND SO THE LAD GOES ON WITH HIS BESSIE AND HIS BESSIE, UNTIL ONE WOULD THINK HE HAS NEVER A MOTHER IN THE WORLD.

By an egregious oversight on the part of the architect, designer, or what not, the door of Mrs. Naldret's

room turned into the passage, so that whenever it was opened the cold wind had free play, and made itself felt. Mr. Naldret, bending before the fire to warm himself, does not hear the softest of raps on the panel, but is immediately afterward made sensible that somebody is coming into the room by a chill on the nape of her neck and down the small of her back, "enough to freeze one's marrow," she says. She knows the soft foot, and, without turning, is aware that Bessie Sparrow is in the room.

"Come to the fire, my dear," she says.

Bessie kneels by her side, and the two women, matron and maid, look into the glowing flames, and see pictures there. Their thoughts being on the same subject, the pictures they see are of the same character—all relating to George, and ships, and wild seas, and strange lands.

"I dreamed of you and George last night," says Mrs. Naldret, taking Bessie's hand in hers. She likes the soft touch of Bessie's fingers; her own are hard, and full of knuckles. The liking for anything that is soft is essentially womanly. "I dreamed that you were happily married, and we were all sitting by your fireside, as it might be now, and I was dancing a little one upon my knee."

"Oh, mother!" exclaims Bessie, hiding her face on Mrs. Naldret's neck.

"I told father my dream before breakfast this morning, so it's sure to come true. The little fellow was on my knee as naked as ever it was born, a-cocking out its little legs and drawing of them up again, like a young Samson. Many a time I've had George on my knee like that, and he used to double up his fists as if he wanted to fight all the world at once. George was the finest baby I ever did see; he walked at nine months. He's been a good son, and I'll make a good husband; and he's as genuine as salt, though I say it perhaps as shouldn't, being his mother. Is your grandfather coming in to-night, Bess?"

"I don't think it. He's busy getting ready a Christmas show for the window; he wants to make it look very gay, to attract business. Grandfather's dreadfully worried because business is so bad. People are not laying out as much money as they used to do."

"Money don't buy what it used to do, Bess; things are dearer, and money's the same. Father isn't earning a shilling more to-day than he earned ten years ago, and meat's gone up, and rent's gone up, and plenty of other things have gone up. But we've got to be contented, my dear, and make the best of things. If George could get enough work at home to keep him going, do you suppose he'd ever ha' thought of going to the other end of the world?"

She asks this question with a shrewd, watchful look into Bessie's face, which the girl does not see, her eyes being toward the fire, and adds, immediately, "Although he's not going for long, thank God."

"It is very, very hard," sighs Bessie, "that he should have to go."

"It would be harder, my dear, for him to remain here doing nothing. There's nothing that does a man—or a woman either, Bess—so much mischief as idleness. My old mother used to say that when a man's idle he's worshipping the devil. You know very well, Bess, that I'm all for contentment. One can make a little do if one's mind is made up for it—just as one can find a great deal not enough, if one's mind is set that way. For my part, I think that life's too short to worry your inside out, a-wishing for this, and a-longing for that, and a-sighing for t'other. When George began to talk of going abroad, I said to him, 'Home's home, George, and you can be happy on bread-and-cheese and kisses, supposing you can't get better.' 'Very well, mother,' said George, 'I'm satisfied with that. But come,' said he, in his coaxing way—'you know, Bessie—but come, you say home's home, and you're right, mammy.' (He always calls me mammy when he's going to get the best of me with his tongue—he knows, the cunning lad, that it reminds me of the time when he was a baby!) 'You're right, mammy,' he said; 'but I love Bess, and I want to marry her. I want to have her all to myself,' he said. 'I'm not happy when I'm away from her,' he said. 'I want to see her a-setting by my fireside,' he said. 'I don't want to be standing at the street-door a-saying good-night to her' (what a long time it takes a-saying! don't it, Bess? Ah, I remember!)—'a-saying good-night to her, with my arm round her waist, and my heart so full of love for her that I can hardly speak' (his very words, my dear!), 'and then, just as I'm feeling happy and forgetting every thing else in the world, to hear grandfather's voice piping out from the room behind the shop, 'Don't you think it's time to go home, George? Don't you think that it's time for Bessie to be abed?' And I don't want,' said George, 'when I answer in a shamefaced way, 'All right, grandfather; just five minutes more!' to hear his voice, in less than half a minute, waking me out of a happy dream, calling out, 'Time's up, George! Don't you think you ought to go home, George? Don't you think Bessie's tired, George?' 'That's all well and good,' said I to him; 'but what's that to do with going abroad?' 'Oh, mammy,' he said, 'when I marry Bessie, don't I want to give her a decent bed to lie upon? Ain't I bound to get a bit of furniture together?' Well, well; and so the lad goes on with his Bessie and his Bessie, until one would think he has never a mother in the world."

There is not a spice of jealousy in her tone as she says this, although she pretends to pout, for the arm that is around Bessie tightens on the girl's waist, and the mother's lips touch the girl's face lovingly. All that Mrs. Naldret has said is honey to Bessie, and the girl drinks it in, and enjoys it, as bright, fresh youth only can enjoy.

"So," continues Mrs. Naldret, pursuing her story, "when George comes home very down in the mouth, as he does a little while ago, and says that trade's slack, and he don't see how he's to get the bit of furniture together that he's bound to have when he's married, I knew what was coming. And as he's got the opportunity—and a passage free, thanks to Mr. Million" (here

Mrs. Naldret looks again at Bessie in the same watchful manner as before, and Bessie, in whose eyes the tears are gathering, and upon whose face the soft glow of the fire-light is reflected, again does not observe it—"I can't blame him; though, mind you, my dear, if he could earn what he wants here, I'd be the last to give him a word of encouragement. But he can't earn it here, he says; times are too bad. He can't get enough work here, he says; there's too little to do, and too many workmen to do it. So he's going abroad to get it, and good luck go with him and come back with him! Say that, my dear."

"Good luck go with him," repeats Bessie, unable to keep back her tears, "and come back with him!"

"That's right. And as George has made up his mind and can't turn back now, we must put strength into him, whether he's right or whether he's wrong. So dry your eyes, my girl, and send him away with a light heart instead of a heavy one. Don't you know that wet things are always heavier to carry than dry? George has got to fight with the world, you see; and if a young fellow stands up to fight with the tears running down his cheeks, he's bound to get the worst of it. But if he says, 'Come on,' with a cheerful heart and a smiling face, he stands a good chance of winning—as George will, see if he don't!"

"You dear, good mother!" and Bessie kisses Mrs. Naldret's neck again and again.

"Now, then," says Mrs. Naldret, rising from before the fire, "go and wash your eyes with cold water, my dear. Go into George's room. Lord forgive me!" she soliloquizes when Bessie has gone, "I'd give my fingers for George not to go. But what's the use of fretting and worrying one's life away, now that he's made up his mind? I shall be glad when they are married, though I doubt she doesn't love George as well as George loves her. But it'll come; it'll come. Times are different now to what they were, and girls are different. A little more fond of dress and pleasure and fine ways. She was very tender just now—she feels it, now that George is really going. It would be better for her if he was to stay; but George is right about the times being hard. Ah, well! it ain't many of us as gets our bread well buttered in this part of the world! But there! I've tasted sweet bread without a bit of butter on it many and many a time!"

CHAPTER III.

YOU WORE ROSES THEN, MOTHER.

HAVING made this reflection, Mrs. Naldret thinks of her husband again, and wonders what makes him so late to-night. But in a few moments she hears a stamping in the passage. "That's Jim," she thinks, with a light in her eyes. A rough, comely man, with no hair on his face but a bit of English whisker of a light sandy color in keeping with his skin, which is of a light sandy color also. Head well shaped, slightly bald, especially on one side, where the hair has been worn away by the friction of his two-foot rule. When Jim Naldret makes a purse of his lips, and rubs the side of his head with his rule, his mates know that he is in earnest. And he is very often in earnest.

"It's mortal cold, mother," he says, almost before he enters.

"There's a nice fire, father," replies Mrs. Naldret, cheerfully, "that'll soon warm you."

"I don't know about that," he returns, with the handle of the door in his hand. "Now look here—did you ever see such a door as this? Opens bang into the passage."

"You're always grumbling about the door, father."

"Well, if I like it, it doesn't do any one any harm, does it? The architect was a born fool, that's what he was."

To support his assertion that the architect was a born fool, Jim Naldret thinks it necessary to make a martyr of himself; so he stands in the draught, and shivers demonstratively as the cold wind blows upon him.

"Never mind the door, Jim," says Mrs. Naldret, coaxingly. "Come and wash your hands."

"But I shall mind the door!" exclaims Jim Naldret, who is endowed with a large organ of combativeness, and never can be induced to shirk an argument. "The architect he made this door for warm weather. Then it's all very well; but in this weather it's a mistake, that's what it is. Directly you open it comes a blast cold enough to freeze one. I ain't swearing, mother, because I say blast."

This small pleasantry restores his equanimity, and he repeats it with approving nods; but it produces little effect upon his wife, who says:

"Will you wash your hands and face, father, instead of maudlin?"

"All right, all right, mother! Bring the basin in here, and I'll soon sluice myself."

Mrs. Naldret, going to their bedroom, which is at the back of the parlor, to get the soap and water, calls out softly from that sanctuary:

"Bessie's here, father."

"Ah," he says, rubbing his knuckles before the fire. "Where is she?"

"Up stairs in George's room. She'll be down presently. She's pretty low in spirits, father."

"I suppose you've been having a cry together, mother." By this time Mrs. Naldret has brought in a basin of water and a towel, which she places on a wooden chair. "I dare say George'll pipe his eye a bit too, when he says good-bye to some of his mates. Ugh! the water is cold!"

"George pipe his eye! Not him! He's a man, is George—not one of your crying sort."

"I don't know about that," gasps Jim Naldret; "a man may be crying, although you don't see the tears running down his face. Ugh!"

There was something apposite to his own condition in this remark; for Jim's eyes were smarting and watering in consequence of the soap getting into them.

"That's true, Jim. Many a one's heart cries when the eyes are dry."

"I can't get over Mr. Million getting the passage ticket for George. I can't get over it, mother. It's bothered me ever so much."

"Well, it's only steerage, Jim, and you can't say that it wasn't kind of Mr. Million."

"I don't know so much about that, mother."

"Do you know, Jim," says Mrs. Naldret, after a pause, during which both seem to be thinking of something they deem it not prudent or wise to speak about, "that I've sometimes fancied"—Here the old black cat rubs itself against her ankles, and she stoops to fondle it, which perhaps is the reason why she does not complete the sentence.

"Fancied what, mother?"

"That young Mr. Million was fond of Bessie."

"I shouldn't wonder," he replies, with a cough.

"Who wouldn't be?"

"Yes; but not in that way."

"Not in what way, mother?"

"You drive me out of all patience, Jim. As if you couldn't understand—but you men are so blind!"

"And you women are so knowing!" retorts Jim Naldret, in a tone made slightly acid, because he is groping about for a towel, and cannot find it. "Where is the towel, mother? That's Bessie's step, I know. Come and kiss me, my girl."

"There!" exclaims Bessie, who has just entered the room, standing before him with an air of comical remonstrance, with patches of soap-suds on her nose and face, "you've made my face all wet."

"Father never will wash the soap off his skin before he dries it," says Mrs. Naldret, wiping Bessie's face with her apron.

"Never mind, Bessie," says Mr. Naldret, rubbing himself hot; "your face'll stand it better than some I've seen. It can't wash the color out of your cheeks."

Bessie laughs, and asks him how does he know, and says there is a sort of paint that women use that defies water, while Mrs. Naldret tells him not to be satirical, remarking that all women have their little weaknesses.

"Weaknesses!" echoes Mr. Naldret, digging into the corners of his eyes viciously. "It's imposition, that's what it is!"

"You'll rub all the skin off your face, if you rub like that."

"It's a-playing a man false," continues Jim Naldret, not to be diverted from the subject, "that's what it is. It's a—"

"Is George coming home to tea, do you know, father?" asks Mrs. Naldret, endeavoring to stem the torrent.

"No; he told me we wasn't to wait for him. It's a-trading under false pretences."

"Not coming home to tea! And here I've been laying the table-cloth for him because I know he enjoys his tea better when there's something white on the table. Mind you remember that, Bessie. There's nothing like studying a man's little ways, if you want to live happy with him."

"I wondered what the table-cloth was on for," remarks Jim Naldret; and then resumes with bull-dog tenacity, "It's a-trading under false pretences, that's what it is! Little weaknesses! Why?"

"Now, father, will you come and have tea?"

"Now, mother, will you learn manners, and not interrupt? But I can have my tea and talk too."

Mrs. Naldret makes a great fuss in setting chairs, and a great clatter with the cups and saucers, but her wiles produce not the slightest effect on her husband, who seats himself and says:

"Well, this is my opinion, and I wouldn't mind a-telling of it to the Queen. What do girls look forward to naturally? Why, matrimony, to be sure!"

"Put another lump of sugar in father's cup, Bessie. He likes it sweet."

"Well," continues the irrepressible Jim, "looking forward to that, they ought to be honest and fair to the men, and not try to take them in by painting themselves up. It's a good many years ago that I fell in love with you, mother, and a bright-looking girl you was when you said 'Yes' to me. You wore roses then, mother! But if, when I married you, I had found that the roses in your cheek came off with a damp towel, and that you hadn't any eyebrows to speak of except what you put on with a brush, and that what I saw of your skin before I married you was a deal whiter than what I saw of your skin after I married you—I'd—I'd—"

"What on earth would you have done, father?" asks Mrs. Naldret, laughing.

"I'd have had you up before the magistrate," replies Jim Naldret, with a look of sly humor. "I'd have had you fined, as sure as my name's Jim."

"That wouldn't have hurt me," says Mrs. Naldret, entering into the humor of the idea, and winking at Bessie; "my husband would have had to pay the fine."

Jim Naldret gives a great laugh at this conclusion of the argument, in appreciation of having been worsted by these last few pithy words, and says, with an admiring look at his wife:

"Well, let you women alone!"

Then, this subject being disposed of, and Jim Naldret having had his say, Mrs. Naldret asks if he has brought home the *Ha'penny Trumpet*.

"Yes," he answers, "here it is. A great comfort to the poor man are the ha'penny papers. He gets all the news of the day for a ha'penny—all the police courts."

"Ah," interrupts Mrs. Naldret, "that's the sort of reading I like. Give me a newspaper with plenty of police-court cases."

But police-court cases have not the charm for Jim Naldret that they have for the women, with whom a trial for breach of promise is perhaps the most interesting reading in the world.

"There's a strike in the North among the colliers," says Jim. "The old hands are beating the new men, and setting fire to their houses."

"And turning," adds Mrs. Naldret, "the women and children into the streets, I dare say—the wretches!"

"I don't know so much about that, mother. Men are goaded sometimes, till they lose their heads. If a man puts my blood up, I hit him."

"You, father! You hurt any one!"

"I said I'd hit him—I didn't say I'd hurt him. I'd hit him soft, perhaps; but I'd be bound to hit him if he put my blood up."

"A strike's a wicked thing, father," is Mrs. Naldret's commentary.

"I don't know so much about that. There's a good deal to be said on both sides."

"There's Saul Fielding," says Mrs. Naldret; "getting up a strike was the ruin of him—and hurt a good many others, hurt 'em badly, as you know, Jim."

By this time the tea-things are cleared away, the hearth is swept up, and the fire is trimmed. The picture that is presented in this humble room is a very pleasant one; Bessie and Mrs. Naldret are doing needle-work more as a pastime than anything else, and Jim is looking down the columns of the *Trumpet*.

"Saul Fielding went too far," says Jim; "and when he had dragged a lot of men into a mess, he deserted them and showed the white feather. I'm for my rights, and I'll stand up for them, but I'm not for violence nor unreasonable measures. Saul Fielding's fine speech misled a many whoswore by him, and would have followed him through thick and thin. He makes a speech one night that set the men on fire. I heard it myself, and I was all of a quiver: but when I was in the cold air by myself I got my reason back, and I saw that Saul Fielding was putting things in a wrong light. But other men didn't see it. Then what does he do? Deserts his colors the very next day, and leaves the men that he's misled in the lurch."

"He may have got in the air, as you did, Jim, and thought better of what he had said. He may have found out afterward that he was wrong."

"Not he! He had plenty of time to consider beforehand—seemed as if he had studied his speeches by heart—never stumbled over a word, as the others did, who were a deal honest than him—stumbled over 'em as if words was stones."

"Well, poor fellow, he suffered enough. From that day masters and men have been against him."

"He's made his bed and he must lay on it," says Jim Naldret; "and you know, mother, even if he could wipe that part of his life away, he's not fit company for honest men and women."

Jim Naldret feels inclined to say a great deal more on another subject about Saul Fielding, but as the subject which he would have ventilated is a delicate one, and refers to a woman who is not Saul Fielding's wife, he refrains because Bessie is present.

"Let Saul Fielding drop, mother."

Mrs. Naldret deems it wise to say no more about Saul, and allows a minute or so to elapse before she speaks again.

"Anything in the paper, Jim, about that working-man put up for Parliament?"

"He didn't get in."

Mrs. Naldret expresses her satisfaction at this result by saying that "It's a good job for his family, if he's got one."

"Why shouldn't a working-man be in Parliament, mother?" asks Jim Naldret.

"Because he can't be two things at once. If he fuddles away all his time at Parliament he can't have time to work; and if he don't work for his living, he's not a working-man."

"He'd work with his tongue, mother."

"He'd better work with his hands," says Mrs. Naldret, emphatically, "and leave tongue work to his wife. She'd do it better, I'll be bound."

"I've no doubt she would," says Jim Naldret, with a chuckle. "But that working-man in Parliament question is a problem."

"Well, don't you bother your head about it—that's other people's business. My old mother used to say that every hen's got enough to do to look after its own chicks, and it clacks enough over that, goodness knows."

"But I am not a hen, mother," remonstrates Jim; "I'm a cock, and I like to have a crow now and then."

"Well," exclaims Mrs. Naldret, stitching viciously, "crow on your own dunghill. Don't you go encroaching on other people's premises."

CHAPTER IV.

IF I DID NOT LOVE HER I WOULD NOT GO AWAY.

THE entrance of George Naldret and young Mr. Million gives a new turn to the conversation, and to the aspect of affairs. George Naldret needs but a very few words of introduction. He is like his father was when his father was a young man. More comely-looking because of the difference in their ages; but his little bit of English whisker is after the same model as his father's, and his hair is also of a light sandy color. His head is well shaped, and he has contracted his father's habit of rubbing one side of it with his two-foot rule when he is in earnest. When he came into the world his mother declared he was as like his father as two peas, which statement, regarded purely from a grammatical point of view, involved a contradiction of ideas. But grammar stands for nothing with some. Poor folks who have received imperfect education are not given to hypercriticism. It is not what is said, but what is meant. George's father, and his father's father had been carpenters before him, and, as he had taken after them, he may be said to have become a carpenter by hereditary law. Mrs. Naldret was satisfied. To have a trade at one's finger-ends, as she would have expressed it, is not a bad inheritance.

Young Mr. Million was named after his father, James, and was, therefore, called young Mr. Million to prevent confusion. His father, and his father's father had been brewers, or, more correctly speaking, in the brewing interest before him, and he was supposed to take after them. There was this difference, however, between

him and George Naldret. George Naldret was a thoroughly good carpenter, but it cannot be said that young Mr. Million was a thoroughly good brewer. In point of fact, he was not a brewer at all, for he knew no more of the trade than I do. He knew a good glass of beer when he was drinking it, but he did not know how to make it, as George knew a good piece of carpentering when it was before him; but then George could produce a similar piece of work himself. George took pride in his trade; young Mr. Million looked down upon his because it was a trade—he thought it ought to be a profession; although he and his were the last who should have thought unkindly of it, for from the profits of the family brewery a vast fortune had been accumulated. Estates had been bought; position in society had been bought; a seat in the House had been bought; perhaps, by and by, a title would be bought; for eminence deserves recognition; and a man can be eminent in so many different ways. One may be an eminent tea-dealer, or an eminent chiropodist, or an eminent dentist, if one's profits are large enough. The seat in the House was occupied at the present time by Mr. James Million, Senior, whose chief business in the Senate appeared to be to look sharply after his own interests, and those of his class, and to vote as he was bid upon those indifferent questions of public interest which did not affect the profits of his brewery, and which were not likely to lessen his income from it. For Mr. Million's brewery, being an old established institution, had become a sacred "vested interest," which it was absolute sacrilege to touch or interfere with. And it is true that "vested interests" are ticklish questions to deal with; but it happens now and then, in the course of time, that what is a "vested interest" with the few (being fed and pampered until it has attained a monstrous growth) becomes a vested wrong to the many. Then the safety of society demands that something should be done to stop the monstrous growth from becoming more monstrous still. The name of Million was well known in the locality in which the Naldrets resided, for a great many of the beer-shops and public-houses in the streets round about were under the family thumb, so to speak, and it was more than the commercial lives of the proprietors were worth to supply any liquids but those that Million brewed to the thirsty souls who patronized them. And nice houses they were for a man to thrive upon—worthy steps upon the ladder of fame for a man to grow eminent by!

Young Mr. Million was a handsome-looking fellow, with the best of clothes, and with plenty of money in his purse. Having no career marked out for him pending the time when he would have to step into his father's shoes, he made one for himself. He became a merchant in wild oats—a kind of merchandise which is popularly considered to be rather a creditable thing for young men to speculate in; and it was a proof of his industry that he was accumulating a large supply of the corn—having regard probably to its future value in the market. But in this respect he was emulated by many who deem it almost a point of honor to have their granaries well supplied with the commodity.

As the young men enter the room, Bessie's eyes brighten. She knows George's footsteps well, and has not recognized the other. George enters first, and he has drawn Bessie to him and kissed her, and she him, before she sees young Mr. Million. When she does see that heir to the family brewery, she gently releases herself from George's embrace, and stands a little aside, with a heightened color in her face. The action is perfectly natural, and just what a modest girl would do in the presence of a comparative stranger—as young Mr. Million must have been, necessarily, he being so high in the social scale, and she so low. The young gentleman, in the most affable manner, shakes hands all round, and gives them good-evening.

"Meeting George as I was strolling this way," he says, accepting the chair which Mrs. Naldret offers him, "and having something to say to him, I thought I might take advantage of his offer to step in and rest for a minute or so."

Had he told the exact truth, he would have confessed that he had no idea of coming into the house until he had heard from old Ben Sparrow, at whose shop he had called, that Bessie was at Mrs. Naldret's, and that, meeting George afterward, he had walked with him to the door, and had accepted a casual invitation to walk in, given out of mere politeness, and almost as a matter of form.

"You have the *Trumpet* there, I see," continues young Mr. Million, addressing the master of the house; "is there anything particular in it?"

"No, sir," replies Jim, "nothing but the usual things—strikes, elections, and that like. There's always plenty stirring to fill a newspaper."

"That there is," says the young brewer; "I'm sorry to hear of the strikes spreading. They make things bad in every way."

"That they do, sir," chimes in Mrs. Naldret; "let well alone, I say."

Young Mr. Million assents with a motion of his head. Perhaps he would have spoken if his attention had not been fixed upon Bessie, whom George had drawn within the circle of his arm.

"Women can't be expected," says Jim Naldret, with rather less politeness than he usually shows to his wife in company, "to understand the rights and wrongs of this sort of thing. It's only the horse in the shafts that feels the weight of the pull."

"Well," said young Mr. Million in a careless manner, "I'm no politician; I leave that to my father. So, without venturing an opinion in the presence of one who has studied these questions"—with a condescending nod to Jim Naldret—"I can't do better than side with Mrs. Naldret, and say with her, 'Let well alone.' With a graceful bow to that worthy creature, who receives it without gratitude, for it does not please her to find herself trapped into taking sides with a stranger, however much of a gentleman he may be, against her husband.

"Mr. Million came to tell me," says George, during the lull that follows, clearing his throat, "that the *Queen of the South* sails earlier than was expected. It goes out of the Mersey the day after to-morrow."

He does not look at any one of them as he says this, but they all, with the exception of young Mr. Million, turn their anxious eyes to George. The *Queen of the South* is the name of the ship in which George is to sail for the other end of the world.

"So soon!" exclaims Mrs. Naldret, with a motherly movement toward her son.

"So soon!" echoes Bessie, faintly, clinging closer to her lover.

And "Why not stop at home?" is on the mother's tongue. "Even now, why not stop at home, and be contented?" But she knows what George's answer would be, so she restrains her speech. "I want my Bessie," he would have answered, "and I want a home to bring her to. If I did not love her, I would not go away, but I would be content to work here as you have done all your lives, and live, as you have done, from hand to mouth."

To cheer them, young Mr. Million tells them the latest best news from the other side of the world—how cheaply a man could live; how much larger a workman's earnings were there than here; what a demand there was for skilled labor; and what chances there were for every man whose head was screwed on the right way.

"Suppose a man doesn't wish to work at his trade," he says, "and takes it into his head to make a venture for three or four months. There are the gold fields. All over New South Wales and New Zealand new gold fields are being discovered. They say that the natives of New Zealand are bringing in great lumps of gold from the north, and that the ground there has never been turned over, and is full of gold. Once in the colonies, it takes no time to get to these places; and even if a man is not fortunate enough to do well, he can come back to his trade. The experiment that occupies three or four months in making is not a great slice out of a young man's life, and the prize that's likely to be gained is worth the venture. Then at these new places, supposing George does not care to run the risk that lies in gold-digging, but determines to stick to his trade, what better one can he have than that of a carpenter? Houses and shops must be built, and they must be built of wood. Who is to build them? Why, carpenters! Think of the scope there is for good workmen. Why, a carpenter must be almost a king in those places! If I hadn't been born into a fortune," he concludes, "I would give three cheers for Captain Cook, and be off without a day's delay."

When he bids them good-night, as he does presently, seeing that silence falls upon them and that they wish to be left alone, he does not leave a bad impression behind him. But although he has not addressed half a dozen words to the girl, he sees with his mind's eye Bessie's bright face, and no other, as he walks through the cold air.

Now what on earth could a pretty girl like Bessie have to do with the stock of wild oats which young Mr. Million was so industriously collecting?

CHAPTER V.

WITH THE DAWNING OF A NEW YEAR, BEGIN A NEW LIFE.

WHEN Saul Fielding left Mrs. Naldret he made his way through the narrow streets, shivering and stamping, until he came to a house, the lower portion of which was devoted to the sale of plum-and-pease-pudding, and food of that description.

The side-door which led to the upper portion of the house was open, and Saul ascended the dark stairs until there were no more stairs to ascend, and entered a room, the low roof of which shelved in one part almost to the floor. A common lamp was alight, the flame being turned very low down, more, it is to be presumed, for the sake of economy than for safety, for there was nothing in the room of the slightest value. What little furniture there was was rickety and broken; two cane chairs, nearly bald; the few ragged pieces of cane that were left in the frames were tattered and of various lengths, and mournfully proclaimed, "See what we have come to!" while one of the chairs was so completely decrepit, that it had lost its backbone, and had so little life left in it, that it wheezed when sat upon; a turn-up bedstead, which made a miserable pretense of being something else; a deal table, which once could flap its wings, but could do so no longer; on the table two cups, which were not of a match, but this was really of the smallest consequence, for one was chipped and one was without a handle; and a metal tea-pot, the surface of which was so battered, that it might be likened to the face of a worn out prize-fighter who had played second-best in a hundred fierce encounters. But, common and poor as was everything in the room, everything was as clean and tidy as orderly hands could make it.

Saul Fielding turned up the light of the lamp, and the lamp spat and spluttered in the operation, with a discontented air of being ill fed; this discontent was plainly expressed in the top of the wick, which was lurid and inflamed. There were signs in the room of a woman's care, and Saul Fielding sat down upon the wheezy chair, and waited with his head resting upon his hand. He had not long to wait; the sound of light steps running up the stairs caused him to rise and look towards the door.

"Jane!"

She nodded and kissed him, and asked him if he were hungry.

"No," he answered; "where have you been to?"

"Only on a little errand. Come, you must be hungry. You've had no tea, I know."

She took the remains of a loaf, and a yellow basin containing a little dripping, from a cupboard, and cut

the bread and spread the dripping solicitously. Then she pressed him to eat.

"I shall have some with you," she said. To please her, he forced himself to eat.

"It's very cold, Jane."

"Very, Saul."

She was a woman who once was very fair to look at, who was fair now, despite her poverty. She was not more than twenty-five years of age, but she looked older; there was no wedding-ring on her finger, and she was too poor for adornment of any kind about her person. There was beauty in her, however; the beauty that lies in resignation. And now, as Saul Fielding looked at her furtively, he noticed, with evident inward fear, a certain kind of sad resolution in her manner, which tempered the signs of long suffering that dwelt in her face. He put his hand timidly upon her once, and said, in a troubled voice, "You have no flannel petticoat on, Jane."

"No, Saul," she answered cheerfully; "I have pledged it."

An impressive silence followed. As the darkness that fell upon Egypt could be felt, so the silence that fell upon this room spoke—with bitter, brazen tongue.

"I have been out all the afternoon," she said, presently. "First I went to—you know where." Her soft voice faltered, and carried the meaning of the vague words to his sense.

"And saw her?" he asked, wistfully.

"Yes; she was playing on the door-step. She looked so beautiful! I—I kissed her."

All the love that woman's heart can feel, all the tenderness of which woman's love is capable, were expressed in the tone in which she uttered these simple words. She placed her fingers on her lips, and dwelt upon the memory of the kiss with tearful eyes, with heart that ached with excess of love.

"Did I tell you that last week I tried again to get work, Saul?"

"No," he said; "you failed!" As if he knew for certain with what result.

"Yes; I failed," she repeated, sadly.

"I ask myself, sometimes, if I am a man," exclaimed Saul, in contempt of himself, spurning himself as it were; "if I have anything of a man's spirit left within me. Mrs. Naldret said something of that sort to me this very night—not unkindly but with a good purpose. When I think of myself as I was many years ago, it seems to me that I am transformed. And the future! Good God! what lies in it for us?"

"I am a tie upon you, Saul."

"A tie upon me!" he said, in a tone of wonder. "Jane, you are my salvation! But for you I should have drifted into God knows what. You are at once my joy and my remorse."

He took from the mantel-shelf a broken piece of looking-glass, and gazed at the reflection of his face. A bold and handsome face, but with deeper lines in it than his years, which were not more than thirty-two or three, warranted. Strong passion and dissipation had left striking marks behind them, but his clear blue eyes were as yet undimmed, and shone with a luster which denoted that there was vigor still in him. His mouth was large, and the lips were the most noticeable features in his face; they were the lips of one to whom eloquence came as a natural gift, firm, and tremulous when need be. The change that he saw in himself as he looked back to the time gone by, gave point and bitterness to his next words.

"I was not like this once. When you first saw me, Jane, these marks and lines were wanting—they have come all too soon. But no one is to blame but I. I have brought it all on myself. On myself! On you!—you suffer with me, patiently, uncomplainingly. You have a greater load than I to bear, and you will not let me lighten it."

"I will not let you, Saul! I don't understand."

"Because every time I approach the subject I try to approach it by a different road."

"Ah, I know now," she said, softly.

"Jane, I ask you for the twentieth time." He held out his hands supplicatingly to her. "Let me do what I can to remove the shame from you. Let me do what I can to atone for my fault. As you love me, Jane, marry me!"

"As I love you, Saul, I refuse!"

He turned from her, and paced the room; she watched him with steady, loving eyes, and the signs of a sad, fixed resolution deepened in her face. "Come and sit by me, Saul."

He obeyed her, and she drew his head upon her breast and kissed his lips.

"There's no question—no doubt of the love between us, Saul?"

"None, Jane."

"If some chance were to part us this night, and I was never to look upon your face again?"

"Jane!"

"And I was never to look upon your face again," she repeated, with a cheerful smile, "I should, if I lived to be an old woman, and you to be an old man, never for one moment doubt that you loved me through all the years."

"It is like you, Jane; your faith would not be misplaced."

"I know it, and I know that you would be to me the same—you would believe that no other man could hold the place in my heart that you have always held."

He took her in his arms, and said that she was his anchor; that as nothing on earth could shake her faith in him, so nothing on earth could shake his faith in her; after what she had said (although he knew it before, and would have staked his worthless life on it), could she still refuse to allow him to make her the only reparation it was in his power to make?

She waived the question for the present, and said: "We are at the lowest ebb, Saul."

"Ay," he answered.

"Then you must not speak of drifting," she

said, tenderly; "we have drifted low enough. Remember, Saul," and she took his hand in hers, and looked into his eyes, "we have not ourselves alone to think of. There is another. It only needs resolution. Come—let us talk of it. Here there is no hope."

"There seems none, Jane; all heart has left me."

"Elsewhere things might be better for you."

"For us," he said, correcting her.

"What is better for you is better for me" she replied.

"I heard to-day that George Naldret"—

"God bless him!"

"Amen! God bless him! I heard to-day that he was going away sooner than was expected."

"I heard so too, Jane; and I went round to Mrs. Naldret's to-night to see him if I could. But he had not come home."

"Saul," she said, hiding her face on his shoulder, and pressing him in her arms, as one might do who was about to lose what she loved best in this world, "we have suffered much together; our love for each other seems to keep us down."

"It is I—I only who am to blame. I commenced life badly, and went from bad to worse."

She placed her hand upon his lips, and stopped further self-accusation.

"It is a blessing for many," she said, "that these new lands have been discovered. A man can commence a new life there without being crushed by the misfortunes or faults of the past, if he be earnest enough to acquire strength. It might be a blessing to you."

"It might," he assented, "if you were with me."

"You, with your gifts, with your talent for many things, might do so well there. Saul, turn that lamp down; the light glares and hurts my eyes."

He turned down the lamp; the sullen wick flickered, once, twice, thrice, and the room was in darkness.

"Let it be, Saul; don't light it. I love to talk to you in the dark. It reminds me of a time—do you remember?"

Did he remember? There came to him, in the gloom of the mean room, the memory of the time, years ago, when he first told her that he loved her. In a few brief moments that followed, after the light had gone out, the entire scene was presented to him; every word that was uttered by him and by her came to him. It was in the dark that he had told her; it was in the dark that he vowed to be faithful to her, and she to him. It seemed as if it might have been yesterday, for he held her in his arms now, as he had held her then, and he felt her heart beating against his. But the misery of the present time was too pressing to forget for more than a brief space, and he raised his head from her breast, and faced the gleams of the clear bright cold night, as they shone through the garret window.

"If I were to tell you," she resumed, "that I have felt no sorrow because of the position we are in—not as regards money, though that cannot be worse, but as regards our living together, not being married—I should tell you what is not true. I have felt bitter, bitter sorrow—bitter, bitter shame. When friends fell off from me I suffered much—when the dearest one I had, a girl of my own age, said, 'Father forbids me to speak to you because you are leading a wrong life; when you are married perhaps father will not be so hard upon you, and we may be friends again—though never as we were, Jane! never as we were!' I turned sick, Saul, because I loved her."

She paused a moment, and he, with a full sense of his own unworthiness, drew a little away from her. What she was saying now was all the more bitter because hitherto no word of implied reproach had passed her lips. She knew his thoughts, and, in her tenderness for him, put forth her hand to draw him closer to her, but withdrew it immediately without fulfilling her purpose, as though it might make her waver.

"I said to myself, Saul knows what is right; when he is in a position he will say to me, Come, Jane; and I pictured to myself our going to some quiet church one morning, without any one knowing it but ourselves, and coming back married. But it was not to be; the part you took in the strike crushed you and kept you down. The masters were against you naturally; and I knew that as my friends had fallen off from me, so your friends and fellow-workmen had fallen off from you. I blamed myself for it, for it was my counsel that caused you to desert the men as you had deserted the masters. I did not see the consequences when I spoke; I should have held my tongue."

"Jane," said Saul, gloomily, "you were right; I had my doubts that very night, after I had made the speech that inflamed me in the making as much as it inflamed the men in the hearing. I lost my head; no wonder they turned against me afterward. I should have done the same by them. But in acting as I did, I acted conscientiously. What, then, did I do, when I began to feel the consequences of my own act? Sought for consolation in drink, and but for your steady, unwavering faith—but for your patient endurance, and your untiring efforts to bring me back to reason—might have found a lower depth even than that. But patient love prevailed. Death will overtake me, or I will overtake it, when I break the promise I gave you not long ago!"

"I know it," she said, with a bright look which he could not see, her back being toward the light, "and that is why I can trust you now; that is why I have courage to say what I am about to say. There is no fear between us of misapprehension of each other's words, of each other's acts; and therefore I do not hesitate. Saul, if I have done my duty by you—and I have striven to do it with all my heart and soul—it remains for you to do your duty by me."

He had no word to say in reply; that he had failed in his duty to her, that upon her had fallen the greater part of the misery, and all the shame of their lot, he was fully conscious. But he had never heard her speak like this before; her voice was firm, though tender, and he held his breath, waiting for her next words.

"It remains for you to do your duty by me."

As she repeated these words it required the strongest effort of her will to keep the beating of her heart and her inward suffering from affecting her voice. She was successful in her effort; for, knowing what would occur within the next few hours, the imminence of the coming crisis gave her strength, and her voice was clear and steady.

"How—in what way?" he asked, in an agitated tone.

"Be sure of one thing, Saul," she cried, turned aside for an instant only by the agitation in his voice; "be sure that I love you wholly, heartfully!"

"I am sure of it. Teach me my duty. I will do it."

She steadied herself again—

"Saul, we can go on as we are. We have come low—very low; but worse is before us, if we are content to let it come, without an effort to avoid it. Listen. The greatest happiness that can come to my lot, is to be your wife."

"I believe it," he said.

"But not as you are, Saul! Tear yourself away from your present surroundings—tear yourself from this place, where there is no hope for you nor for me! If we were at opposite ends of the world, there is a tie that binds us which neither of us can ever forget. If she were in her grave, her lips would seek my breast, her little hands would stretch themselves out to you, to caress your face! What kind of happiness would it be for you to be able to say, Come, Jane; I have a home for you, for her!"

He repeated, with his lips, "What kind of happiness?" but he uttered no sound.

"Make the effort!—away from here. If you succeed—never mind how humble it is, never mind how poor—I will be your wife, loving you no more than I love you now, and you will repay me for all that I have suffered. If you fail—But you will not fail, Saul. I know it! I feel it! Make the effort; for the sake of my love for you, for the sake of yours for me. I think, if it were placed before me that you should make the effort, and, failing, die, or that we should remain as we are, I should choose to lose you, and never look upon your face again—Here! We are near the end of this sad year. Christmas is coming, Saul. Let it be the turning over of a new leaf for us. Nerve yourself—I will not say for your own sake, for I know how poor an incentive that would be to you—but for mine, and with the dawning of a new year, begin a new life!"

"And this is the duty that remains for me to do, Jane?"

"This is the duty."

Not from any doubt of her, or of the task she set before him, did he pause, but because he was for a while overpowered by the goodness of the woman who had sacrificed all for him—who loved him, believed in him, and saw still some capacity for good in him. When he had conquered his emotion, he said, in a broken tone:

"And then, should such a happy time ever come, you will let me make the poor reparation—you will marry me?"

"How gladly!" she exclaimed, "oh, how gladly!"

"No more words are needed than that I promise, Jane?"

"No more, Saul."

"I promise. With all my strength I will try."

He knelt before her, and with his head in her lap, shed tears there, and prayed for strength, prayed with trustfulness, though the road was dark before him. Lifting his head, he saw the light of the clear cold sky shining through the window at her back. With her arms clasped round his neck, she leaned forward and kissed him, and as he folded her in his embrace, he felt that there were tears also on her face.

"The world would be dark without you, dear woman," he said.

Again she kissed him, and asked if it was not time for him to go.

He answered, Yes; and yet was loath to go.

"Good-night, Jane."

"Good-night, dear Saul."

With the handle of the door in his hand, he turned toward her, and saw her standing with the light shining upon her.

CHAPTER VI.

DEAR LOVE, GOOD-BY.

It was three o'clock in the morning before Saul Fielding came home. The bell of Westminster proclaimed the hour with deep-sounding tongue. Saul ascended the stairs quietly. He did not wish to disturb anyone in the house—least of all, Jane, if she were asleep. "Although," he thought, dwelling in love upon her, "the dear woman wakes at my lightest footfall." He crept into the room softly, and paused with hand upraised and listening ear. "She is asleep," he whispered, gladly. He stepped gently to the bedside and laid his hand lightly upon the pillow; it was cold. "Jane!" he cried with a sudden fear upon him. His hand traveled over the bed; it was empty. So strong a trembling took possession of him that he could not stand, and he sank, almost powerless, on the bed. "What is this?" he asked of himself. "Why is she not abed? Jane! Jane! Where are you?" Although he spoke in a tone scarce above a whisper, every word he uttered sounded in the dark room like a knell, and seemed to come back to him charged with terrible meaning—as though some one else were speaking. "Let me think," he muttered, vaguely. "How did I leave her? She was not angry with me. Her words were full of hope. She kissed me, and stood—there!" He looked towards the window, and saw the outlines of her face in the light—saw her eyes gazing tenderly, lovingly, upon him. He knew that what he saw was but a trick of the imagination; but he moved towards the light, and clasped a shadow in his arms. "The world is dark without you, dear woman!" he sobbed, with closed eyes, repeating almost the last words he had said to her! "The world is dark without you! Where are you? Have you left

me?" The table shook beneath his hand, as he rested upon it to steady himself. But he could not control his agitation; he mastered him. With trembling hands he struck a match and lit the lamp; then saw with certainty that Jane was not in the room. Mechanically he took from the table a sheet of paper with writing upon it, which the light disclosed. "Jane's writing," he muttered, and then read:

"DEAR LOVE: I have left you for your good—for mine. I had this in my mind when I spoke to you to-night. I have had it in my mind for a long time. It is the only secret I have ever had which you did not share. We have been so unfortunate in the past, and so clear a duty remains before us, that we should be undeserving of better fortune if we did not strive ourselves to better it. I rely implicitly upon your promise. Tear yourself away from this place, and begin a new life. As long as I live, not a day will pass without my praying for a better fortune for you and for me from Him who sees all things, and who, my heart tells me, approves of what I am doing now. Pray to Him also, dear Love. He will hear you, and pity. Remember what is the greatest happiness that can fall to my lot, and remember that I shall not be unhappy—loving you and having you always in my thoughts—while I think that you are working toward a happier end. I have no fears in leaving you. I know how you will keep your promise—and you have said so much to-night to comfort me! I treasure your words. They are balm to my heart."

"I have taken service with a respectable family, who live a long way from here, and I have adopted an assumed name. The address I inclose is where you can write to me. You will not, I know, seek to turn me from my purpose. I shall write to you to the care of Mrs. Naldret; for the sake of George's friendship for you, she will receive the letters. Tell George."

"Dear Love, good-by! All my prayers are with you. Let them and the memory of me sustain your heart; as the consciousness of your love for me, and my faith in God's goodness, will sustain mine."

"Till death, and after it, your own JANE."

He read the letter twice—first with only a vague sense of its meaning, but the second time with a clearer understanding. Sobs came from his chest, tears came from his eyes, the hand that held the paper trembled, as he read. He knew that she was right. But it was hard to bear—bitterly hard to bear. How lonely the room looked—how mean, and miserable, and desolate! Faint as he was—for he had been standing in the cold streets for hours, playing with the waits, and nothing but a sup of water from a drinking fountain had passed his lips—he had no consciousness of physical weakness. All his thoughts were of Jane, all his heart and soul and mind were charged with tenderness for his dear woman. He looked at the words "Dear Love," until he heard his voice speaking them. He had no thought of following her; her happiness depended upon his obeying her, and he would obey her. He had resolved upon that immediately. But oh, if he could hold her in his embrace once more! If he could hear her dear voice again! If, with her arms around him, he could tell her that he would be faithful to his promise! He dashed the tears from his eyes. "She is thinking of me now," he sobbed; "she is awake and praying for me now! All the suffering of our parting was hers. She took it all upon herself, dear soul! She knew, and I did not; and her heart was bleeding while she shed the light of hope upon mine! What does she say here, dear soul, to lessen my pain? 'You have said so much to-night to comfort me! I treasure your words. They are balm to my heart.' It is like her—it is like her, to write those words. She knew, dear woman, she knew, dear heart, that they would comfort me! But I want strength! I want strength!" His eyes traveled over the letter again, and again he read the words: "Pray to Him, also, dear Love. He will hear you, and pity." Pressing the paper to his lips, Saul Fielding sank upon his knees, and bowed his head upon the bed.

CHAPTER VII.

TOTTIE IS READY TO TEAR OLD BEN SPARROW LIMB FROM LIMB.

As nearly all the persons with whom this history has to deal are almost in the same station of life, and live within a stone's-throw of each other, it is not a difficult task for us to transport ourselves to the little parlor in the rear of old Ben Sparrow's grocer's shop, where Ben Sparrow himself is at present considering the mechanism of a curious and complicated piece of work, the separate part of which are lying before him. Although the parlor and the shop adjoin each other, Ben Sparrow looks upon the parlor as being a long way off, like a country house, as a place where he can obtain repose from the cares of the counter and shelves. And it really is a snug, cosy retreat.

Ben Sparrow came into the world exactly at midnight of the 21st of October, 1805, a few hours after the battle of Trafalgar was fought and won; and the doubtful compliment was at once passed on the new arrival of being the very smallest baby that ever was seen. But then women go into extremes in these matters, and their statements that this is the most beautiful baby in the world, and this the smallest, and this the chubbiest, and this the darlings, must be taken with very large pinches of salt. On that occasion the very smallest baby in the world acted in precisely the same manner as he would have done if he had been the very largest baby in the world. Looking upon the world as his own especial dunghill (as we all of us do), he immediately began to crow, and sounded his trumpet with the weakest of lungs to show that he had made his appearance upon the stage. The sound of Westminster bells was ringing in his ears as he gathered up his little toes and legs and clinched his little fists with an air of saying, Come on! to his brothers and sisters in the profession; and in after-days he often de-

clared jocosely that he perfectly well remembered hearing his first twelve o'clock proclaimed by the tongue of old Westminster. Between that time and this Ben Sparrow had grown from a very small baby to a very small man, and many eventful things had occurred to him. When he came to man's estate—the only estate he ever came into—he entered into business as a grocer; married, and lost his wife, who left behind her one child, a son, who had "gone wrong," as the saying is, and whose place knew him no more. The "ups and downs" of life are generally believed to be a very common experience; but they could scarcely have been so with Ben Sparrow, he had so very many downs, and so very few ups (if any) in the course of his career. Still he managed to plod on somehow or other, until the present time, when he and his granddaughter, Bessie Sparrow, whom you have seen, and Tottie, a child of whom you have had a glimpse, after she had been put to bed by Bessie, are living together in the small house of which the grocer's shop forms a part.

This short biography being concluded, we come upon Ben Sparrow, sitting in his parlor, contemplating the separate parts of the curious piece of work above referred to. The only other person in the room is Tottie, who is perched on a high chair, with a rail in front, to prevent her making an attempt to walk in the air, and whose attention is divided between the old man and certain sweet things which are spread upon the table. Such as three large fat figs—luscious young fellows, new, ripe, and with so tempting an air about them as to make their destruction appear inevitable. (Tottie is ready to act as executioner; her eager eyes attest that they would have short shrift with her.) Such as half a dozen or so sticks of cinnamon, not as fresh-looking as the figs, being indeed rather wrinkled specimens of spice; but notwithstanding their snuffy color, they have an inviting odor about them, and tickle the nose tantalizingly. (Tottie would not say them nay, and is ready to devote them to destruction on the first word of command.) Such as a few dozen of plump dried currants, of exquisite sweetness. (As Tottie well knows, from experience of their fellows, not honestly come by; for, notwithstanding her tender years, Tottie has a vice, as you shall presently see.) Such as two or three bunches of muscatel raisins, rich-looking, princes among grapes, with a bloom upon their skins, which speaks eloquently of luscious juices within. (Tottie's eyes wander to these, and her mouth waters, and her fingers wait but for the opportunity. If some kind fairy would but cry "Shop!" now and call for a quarter of a pound of brown sugar, or an ounce of tea—the best one-and-four-penny—or a ha'porth of barley sugar! But business is slack, as Ben Sparrow will tell you, with a doleful shake of the head, and there appears no such fairy, in the form of a slattern with shoes down at heel, or of a bold-faced girl with her baby in her arms, and with a blue handkerchief tied crosswise over her bosom, or of a gutter-student, capless, with straggling hair, or of a man of any age, weak-eyed, with shaking limbs. No such fairy calls "Shop!" in Tottie's interest, and taps the counter with the nimble penny.) Such as two whole halves (the prettiest of paradoxes) of candied lemon peel with such an appetizing fragrance oozing out of them, with such delicious patches of sugar clinging to their aldermanic insides and outsides—pearls in mussels are valueless as a comparison—that the precious things of the world, such as dolls and boxes of wooden soldiers (would they were all so!), and oyster-shells and pieces of broken china to play at dinners and teas with, fade in the contemplation of them. (At least such are Tottie's feelings as she looks and longs. Oh for the fairy!) Such, to conclude with, as a few shreds of mace, and a clove or two—scarcely worth mentioning in the presence of their superiors.

These delectable joys of life being spread upon the table, immediately under Tottie's nose, and Tottie's attention being divided between them and their lawful owner, Ben Sparrow, it will not be difficult to see which of the two possessed the greater charms for her. A rapid glance at Ben Sparrow's face, a lingering gaze upon fruit and spice, another rapid glance, (with a slight reproach in it this time) at Ben Sparrow's face, and, finding no benevolent intention there, a more fixed and longing gaze upon the treasures of the earth—thus it goes without a word on either side (the thoughts of each being so intensely engrossing), and thus it might have continued for goodness knows how long, but that Ben Sparrow, with a cheery laugh, taps Tottie's cheek with his forefinger, and cries, in a tone of satisfaction:

"Now I've got it!"

(Tottie wishes she had.)

"Now I've got it," cries the old man again; "all complete."

Tottie shifts restlessly in her high chair.

"And Tottie shall see me make it," says Ben, with beaming face, rubbing his hands, and shifting the fruit and spice about, much the same as if they form pieces of a puzzle, and he has found the key to it. "Especially," adds Ben, "as Tottie will sit still, and won't touch."

"No, I never!" exclaims Tottie.

This is Tottie's oath, which she is much given to swearing when her honor is called into question. Tottie's "No, I never!" is, in her estimation, worth a volume of affidavits; but it is much to be feared that her sense of moral obligation is not of a high order.

"And as Tottie's a good little girl!"

"Tottie's a dood little girl!"

There is no expression of doubt in the nods of the head with which Tottie strengthens this declaration.

"And 'I sit still, she shall see me make it."

The good old fellow laughs. He does not seem to realize how difficult is the task he has set Tottie. To sit still, with these treasures in view! Here an agonizing incident occurs. A small piece of candied sugar has become detached from one of the halves of lemon peel, and Ben Sparrow, with an air of abstraction, picks it up, and puts it in his own mouth. Tottie watches him as he moves it about with his tongue, and her own waters

as the sweet dissolves in her imagination. She knows the process as well as Ben, and appreciates it more, and she sighs when the candy is finally disposed of.

"You see, Tottie," says Ben, taking her into his confidence, "business is very slack, and Christmas is coming, Tottie."

Tottie gives a nod of acquiescence.

"So I think to myself"—another nod from Tottie; she also is thinking to herself—"if I can put something in the window that 'I'll make the people look at the figs!"

Here Tottie introduces an artful piece of diplomacy.

"Tottie can spell fig," she says, and proceeds to do it smilingly—"F-I-G, fig."

But, Ben, intent upon his scheme, does not see the point of Tottie's interruption, and proceeds:

"Something that 'I'll make 'em look at the figs, and the currants, and the raisins—something new and spicy" (Ben laughs at this joke, and repeats it)—"something new and spicy—perhaps it 'I'll wake 'em up, and bring 'em in here instead of going to another shop. For they want waking up, Tottie, they want waking up badly."

Solemn nods from Tottie proclaim the serious consideration she has given to the general sleepiness and indifference of Ben Sparrow's customers.

Ben Sparrow picks up a fat currant and contemplates it with as much interest as a geologist would contemplate a new fossil. Tottie's eyes follow his movements; she sits like Patience on a monument, and another sigh escapes her as Ben Sparrow (again abstractedly) puts the currant in his mouth and swallows it. Draw a veil mercifully over Tottie's feelings.

"It was in the middle of the night," says Ben Sparrow, with all the impressiveness demanded by the historical fact, "that I first thought of making ME, and putting ME in the window to attract custom. I was a good deal puzzled about my legs, and my stomach got into my head, and I couldn't get it out; but little by little all my limbs and every other part of me came to me until the idea was complete. And now we'll try it—now we'll set to work and make a MAN! And if you're a good girl, and 'I sit still, she shall see ME made."

Tottie's experience in literature is very limited—extending no further, indeed, than b-a-t bat, c-a-t cat, r-a-t rat, d-i-g dig, f-i-g fig, p-i-g pig—and she knows nothing of the terrible story of Frankenstein; therefore, she is not at all frightened at the idea of seeing a man made, nor has she any fear that it will turn out to be a monster. On the contrary, if Ben Sparrow's thoughts would only take a benevolent turn in the shape of a fig for Tottie, or a few plums for Tottie, or some candied sugar for Tottie, she would be prepared to enjoy the feat which Ben is about to perform, as much as if it were the best bit of fun in the world.

"Now, then," commences Ben, with a whimsical glance at Tottie, who smiles back at him like a true diplomatist. "I don't know what part is generally made first, but it 'I'll be as well to commence with the stomach. Here it is—here's my stomach."

He takes one of the halves of the candied lemon peel, and places it before him, round side up.

"There's a little too much sugar in me," he says, with a more whimsical glance than the first; "it 'I'll make me rather too heavy, I'm afraid. And besides, Tottie, it ain't true to nature. My inside ain't got such a coating as this."

He breaks a piece of candied sugar from the inside of his stomach, looks at Tottie, notices her wistful eyes, and gives it to her. She eats it eagerly, and so quickly as to cause amazement to Ben Sparrow, who says:

"You shouldn't eat so fast, Tottie. Good little girls don't eat so fast as that."

Tottie, with feminine duplicity, accepts this warning in an inverted sense, and cries, with her mouth full of sugar:

"Tottie's a dood little girl!" as if indorsing a statement made by her grandfather. But Tottie's thoughts are not upon the good little girl; at the present moment she resembles a savage. She has tasted blood, and thirsts for more.

"It's a fatter stomach than mine," proceeds Ben, laying his hand upon his stomach of flesh, the stomach he came into the world with; "it's rounder and plumper, and would fit the Lord Mayor or an alderman; but it 'I'll do, I dare say. Now for my neck."

He picks up the thickest piece of cinnamon, and measures it with his eye, breaking the stick in two. "I musn't make my neck too long—nor too short—and I take the thickest piece, Tottie, because it's got to support my head. Like this." He makes a hole in the lemon peel, and sticks the cinnamon in firmly. "Now to stick my head on, Tottie."

He selects the largest of the fat figs, and attaches it to his neck. "What's the next thing? My eyes, to be sure. Currants." Remarkably like eyes do they look when they are inserted in the face of the fat fig. Then he takes a clove for his nose, and, making a thin slit in the fig for his mouth, inserts an appropriate morsel of mace. All this being successfully accomplished, he holds himself up (as far as he goes) for his own and Tottie's inspection and approval. Tottie claps her hands and laughs, but subsides into a quieter humor at a guilty thought that steals into her mind. She thinks what a delightful thing it would be to take her grandfather (as far as he goes) and eat him, bit by bit.

"I begin to look ship-shape," observed Ben Sparrow, gazing admirably at the unfinished effigy of himself. "You see, Tottie, what the people want nowadays is novelty—something new, something they haven't seen before. Give them that, and you're all right." (Which vague generality appears to satisfy him.) "Now here it is—here's novelty—here's something they've never seen before; and if this don't bring custom, I don't know what will."

Tottie gives a grave and silent assent; she cannot speak, for her mind is bent upon cannibalism. She is ready to tear the old man limb from limb.

"But," continues Ben Sparrow, unconscious of the

horrible thought at work in the mind of the apparently innocent child before him, "I must get along with myself, or I shall never be finished. I haven't been in any battle that I know of, and I wasn't born a cripple, so my limbs must be all right when I appear in public. Now for my arms. More cinnamon! I think I may call cinnamon my bones."

When two pieces of cinnamon are stuck into the sides of the candied lemon peel, they look so naked that he says:

"I must put sleeves on my arms."

And impales raisins upon them, and sticks five small slips of mace in each of the last raisins, which serve for fingers.

"Now for my legs, and there I am. More cinnamon!"

Two sticks of cinnamon stuck in the bottom of his candied stomach, and then clothed with raisins, form his legs, and there he is, complete.

"I think I'll do," he says, complacently.

At this moment a voice calls "Shop!" and a fairy, in the shape of a shoeless, ragged girl taps upon the counter. Ben Sparrow goes into the shop to serve, and Tottie is left alone with the effigy. Now it has been mentioned above that Tottie has a vice, and this is it: she is afflicted, not with a raging tooth, but with a tooth so sweet as to weaken her moral sense, so to speak: she is unable to resist temptation when it presents itself to her in the shape of sweetmeats or fruit, and her notions as to the sacredness of such-like property are so loose that (no one being by to see her do it) she helps herself. And yet it is a proof that she possesses a wakeful conscience, that she turns her back upon herself when she pilfers, as if she would wish to make herself believe that she is unconscious of what she is doing. Thus, seeing, say, a bowl of currants near, and no person within sight, she will approach the bowl stealthily, and turning her back to it, will put her hand behind her, and take a fistful, with an air of thinking of something else all the while. And it is a proof that the moral obligation of her conscience is not entirely dormant, that, after the act is committed and enjoyed, she will, under the influence of a human eye, instantly defend herself without being accused, by "No, I never! no, I never!" This express admission of guilt she can no more resist than she can resist the temptation itself. At the present time the sweet effigy of Ben Sparrow is lying within reach upon the table. Shutting her eyes, Tottie stretches out her hand, and plucking her grandfather's left leg bodily from his candied stomach, instantly devours it, cinnamon, raisins, and all—and has just made the last gulp when Ben Sparrow, having served his customer, re-enters the parlor. He casts a puzzled look at his dismembered effigy, and mutters:

"Well! if I didn't think I had made my two legs, may I be sugared!" Which sweet oath is exactly appropriate to the occasion. Then he turns to Tottie, who is gazing unconsciously at vacancy, with a wonderful intense expression in her eyes, and she immediately shakes her head piteously, and cries:

"No, I never! no, I never!"

Ben Sparrow, having his doubts aroused by the vehement asseveration of innocence, says mournfully:

"Oh, Tottie! Tottie! I didn't think you'd do it! To begin to eat me up like that!"

But Tottie shakes her head still more vehemently, and desperately reiterates, "No, I never! no, I never!" With the frightful consciousness that the proofs of her guilt are in her inside, and that she has only to be cut open for them to be produced.

Ben Sparrow, with a grave face, makes himself another leg, moving himself, however, out of Tottie's reach with reproachful significance. An unexpected difficulty occurs at this point. Being top-heavy, he cannot balance himself on his legs; but Ben is of an ingenious turn of mind, and he hits upon the expedient of shoring himself up from behind with stout sticks of cinnamon. Then, setting himself up, he gazes at himself in admiration. Tottie's eyes are also fixed upon the effigy; it possesses a horrible fascination for her.

CHAPTER VIII.

HERE AND THERE ARE FORGOTTEN-NE-BOYS.

ALL night long Saul Fielding kneels by the side of his bed, absorbed in the memory of the woman whom he loves, and who, out of her great love for him, has deserted him. At first his grief is so great that he cannot think coherently; his mind is storm-tossed. But after a time the violence of his grief abates, and things begin to shape themselves in his mind. The night is cold, but he does not feel the winter's chill. The wind sighs and moans at his window, but he does not hear it. As it leaves his lattice, and travels through the courts and streets, it bears upon its wings the influence of the grief it has witnessed, and it sobs to the stone-walls. "There kneels a man in woe!" It gathers strength when it leaves the packed thoroughfares, which, huddled together like a crowd of beggars, seem to seek warmth in close contact, and becomes angry when it reaches the wide streets, angrier still when it reaches the woods, where the trees tremble as it rushes past them. Say that it rushes onward and still onward, and that we have the power to follow it—that we see it merge into other winds, and become furious—that we see its fury die away—that we leave the winter and the night behind us—that we travel ahead of it, over lands and seas, until we come to where spring and daylight are—that we travel onward and still onward, until noon and spring are passed, and we come to where bright sun and summer are. Where are we? Thousands upon thousands of miles away; but the time is the same, for as the warm wind kisses us we look back and see the man kneeling by the side of his bed.

It is winter and night, and there kneels the man. It is summer and day, and here is another man among the mountains lying on the earth, looking at the clouds. And the time is the same. The thoughts of both these

men are in the past. What connection can there be between these two, in such adverse places, seasons, and circumstances? They have never touched hands. What links can bind them? Heart-links? Perhaps. It would not be so strange. It may be that at this present moment, in some distant part of the world of which we have only read or dreamed, links in your life's chain and mine are being forged by persons whose faces we have never seen.

He is desolate. Jane has gone from him. She has left words of comfort behind her; but he may never look upon her face again. She has given him a task to fulfill.

"If I have done my duty by you," she said, "and I have tried to do it, it remains for you to do your duty by me."

He will be true to his dear woman, as she has been to him. He will strive to perform the task she has set before him; he will strive to find a way—ay, if he dies in the attempt. He will consider presently how he shall commence. In the meantime he must think of Jane.

He falls into a doze, thinking of her, and with her in his mind the past comes to him. The aspirations which filled his boyish mind—his love for books—his desire to rise above his surroundings—his reasonings upon the relation of this and that, and his theoretical conclusions, which were to suddenly divert the common custom of things, as if a creation could in a moment crumble into dust the growth of centuries—his delight when he found that he was an orator, and could move an assembly of men to various passions—his meeting with Jane. He went no farther. The memory of her as she was when he first saw her—a bright flower—ah! how bright! how trustful and womanly!—stopped further thought, and for a time no vision appears of his downfall, his weakness, his disgrace his sinking lower, lower, until he is almost a lost man. It comes to him presently with all its shame; but, when he wakes, the chaos of images in his mind resolves itself into this: his life is before him, full of weeds, like an untended garden, but here and there are Forget-me-nots, and each one bears the name of Jane.

The morning light steals in upon his vigil, and still he has not decided how or in what way he shall commence his new life. In truth, he is powerless. He has no weapons to fight with. His old confidence in himself, his pride, his strength of will, are covered with the rust of long weakness. Rising from his knees, he breaks the crust of ice upon the water in his pitcher, and bathes his face. The cold water seems to bring strength to him. He looks about the room, and everything within the poor walls speaks of Jane's love and care for him. The fire is laid with the last few sticks of wood and the last few lumps of coal. The old kettle, filled, is on the hob. The last pinch of tea is in the cup; the remains of the loaf are on the table. Not a thing is forgotten.

"Dear woman!" he murmurs. "It is like you!" He paces the room slowly, striving to think of some path by which he can obtain a home for Jane, and thereby win her and reward her. It is useless, he knows, to seek for work here, in the neighborhood where he is known. He is known too well, and has sunk too low. Who would believe in his profession of amendment? Besides, what is the use of trying? He is of the same trade as George Naldret, and even George, a better workman than he, has resolved to leave and try his fortune elsewhere, because of the difficulty he finds in saving sufficient money to buy a home for the girl he desires to marry. Even George is compelled to emigrate—He stops suddenly in the middle of the room, and draws himself up with a spasmodic motion. Jane's words come to him:

"It is a blessing for many that these new lands have been discovered. A man can commence a new life there, without being crushed by the misfortunes or faults of the past, if he be earnest enough to acquire strength. It might be a blessing to you."

"A new life in a new land!" he says aloud. "All the weakness and shame of the past wiped away, because they will not be known to those around me. I should feel myself a new man—a better man; my strength, my courage would come back to me!" So strong an impression does the inspiration of the thought make upon him that he trembles with excitement. But can he leave Jane—leave the country which holds her dear form? Yes, he can; he will; the memory of her will sustain him; and she will approve, as indeed she has done already by her words. "It is the only way!" he cries, "the only way!" Thus far he thinks, and then sinks into a chair, despairing. The means! How can he obtain the means? He has not a shilling in the world, nor any friends powerful enough to help him. Heaven's gate seems to be more easily accessible to him than this new land across the seas. But he does not allow himself to sink into the lowest depth of despondency. Jane stands before him; her words are with him; like wine they revive his fainting soul. "Come, Saul," he cries aloud to himself, resolutely. "Come—think! Cast aside your weakness. Be your old self once more!" These words, spoken to himself as though they came from the lips of a strong man, sound like a trumpet in his ears, and really strengthen him. Again he thinks of George Naldret. "Mr. Million gave him his passage ticket," he says; "would Mr. Million give me one?" No sooner has he uttered the words than the current of his thoughts is diverted, and he finds himself speculating upon the cause of Mr. Million's generosity to George. Friendship? No, it can scarcely be that. There can be no friendship between George and Mr. Million. Kindness? Perhaps; and yet he has never heard that Mr. Million was noted for the performance of kindly actions. These considerations trouble him somewhat on George's account, although he cannot explain to himself why the fact of Mr. Million giving George a free passage ticket to the other end of the world should cause him uneasiness. "I wonder how it came about," he thinks. "I never heard George speak of emigrating until the ticket was promised to him. At all events, if George has any claim

upon him, I have none. But Mr. Million is a public man, and may be in favor of emigration. It will cost him but little to assist me. There are Government emigration ships which take a man over for almost nothing, I have heard. A line of recommendation from Mr. Million in my favor would be sufficient, perhaps. I will try; I will try. If I knew a prayer that would make my appeal successful, I would say it."

CHAPTER IX.

BATTLEDOR AND SHUTTLECOCK.

As a public man, James Million, Esquire, M. P. for Birmingham, felt it necessary to his position to spend two or three hours in his study every morning, and to "make-believe" to be busy. Had you asked James Million what he was, he would not have told you that he was a brewer or a capitalist, but would have replied, briefly and emphatically, "A public man, sir." Now, to be a public man you must have a shuttlecock; and whether it was that Mr. Million had a real sympathy for the institution known as the working-man, or because the working-man drank large quantities of Million's Entire and Million's Treble X, it is certain that he set up the working-man as his shuttlecock; and it is quite as certain that he set it up without in the least understanding it, being, indeed, a most unskillful player at any game in which his own interests were not directly involved. The game of battledoor and shuttlecock is a popular one with us from childhood upward; but I am not aware that any close observer and noter of various things has ever calculated how many shuttlecocks an ordinary battledoor will outlast. Popular as the game is with children, it is more popular with public men, who, battledoor in hand, are apt (in their enthusiasm and love for the game) to run into exceedingly wild extremes when a new shuttlecock with spick and span new feathers, is cast among them. Such a superabundance of energy do they in their zeal impart into the game that they often sorely bruise the poor shuttlecock, and so knock it out of all shape and proportion that the members of its family find it impossible to recognize it. How many a poor shuttlecock have you and I seen on its last legs, as one might say, in a desperate condition from being much hit, and much missed, and much trodden into the mud, and with feathers that would rival those of a rousy old hen in the last stage of dissolution! and looking upon it in a melancholy mood, may we not be excused for dwelling sadly upon the time (but yesterday!) when its feathers were new and crimson-tipped, and when it proudly took its first flight in the air.

In appearance, James Million, the eminent brewer, was a small, flabby man, with a white face on which the flesh hung loosely. It had been said of him that his morals were as flabby as his flesh; but this was invented by a detractor, and if it conveyed any reproach, it was at best a hazy one. He had a curious trick with his eyes. They were sound, and of the first water—not a flaw in them, as diamond merchants say; but whenever there was presented for his contemplation or consideration a question of a perplexing or disagreeable nature, he would close one of his eyes, and look at it with the other. It was a favorite habit with him to walk along the streets so, with one eye closed; and a man who sat himself up for a satirist or a wag, or both, once said:

"Jimmy Million is so moral that he doesn't like to look on the wickedness of the world; so he shuts one eye, and can only see half of it, and thereby saves himself half the pain."

To James Million, as he sits in his study, comes a servant, who, after due tapping at the door, so as not to disturb the ruminations of the legislator, announces a man in the passage who desires to see Mr. Million.

"Name?" asks Mr. Million.

"Saul Fielding," answers the servant, and adds, "but he says he does not think you know him."

"What does he look like?"

The servant hesitates; he has not made up his mind. Although Saul Fielding is shabbily dressed, he is clean, and Jane's watchful care has made his wardrobe (the whole of which he wears on his back) seem better than it is. Besides, there is "an air" about Saul Fielding which prevents him being placed, in the servant's mind, on the lowest rung of vagabondism.

"Is he a poor man? Is he a working-man?" demands Mr. Million, impatiently.

"He looks like it, sir," replies the servant, not committing himself distinctly to either statement.

Mr. Million has an idle hour before him, which he is not disinclined to devote to the working-man question, so he bids the servant admit the visitor.

"Wait a minute," says Mr. Million to Saul Fielding, as he enters the room. Mr. Million evidently found some very knotty problem in the papers before him, for he bends over them with knitted brows and studious face, and shifts them about, and makes notes on other pieces of paper, and mutters "Pish!" and "Pshaw!" and "Very true!" and "This must be seen to!" with many remarks indicative of the engrossing nature of the subject which engages his attention. After a sufficient exhibition of this by-play, which doubtless impresses his visitor with a proper idea of his importance, and of the immense interest he takes in public matters, he pushes the papers aside with a weary air, and looks up, with one eye closed and one eye open. What he sees before him does not seem to afford him any comfort; for it is a strange thing with public players of battledoor and shuttlecock, that although they have in theory a high respect for their shuttlecocks, they have in absolute fact a very strong distaste for them. Seeing that he is expected to speak, Saul Fielding commences; he is at no loss for words, but he speaks more slowly than usual; in consequence of the heavy stake he has in the interview.

"I have ventured to call upon you, sir," he says, "in the hope that you will take some interest in my

story, and that you will extend a helping hand to a poor man."

Somewhat fretfully—for careful as he strives to be, Saul Fielding has been unwise in his introduction, which might be construed into an appeal for alms—somewhat fretfully, then, Mr. Million interposes with:

"A working-man?"

"I hope I may call myself so—although, strictly speaking, I have done but little work for a long time."

Mr. Million gazes with curiosity at his visitor, and asks, in a self-complacent, insolent tone, as if he knows all about it:

"Not able to get work, eh?"

"I have not been able to get it, sir."

"But quite willing to do it if you could get it?"

"Quite willing, sir; more than willing—thankful."

Saul Fielding knows that already he is beginning to lose ground, but his voice is even more respectful and humble than at first—although the very nature of the man causes him to speak with a certain confidence and independence which is eminently offensive to the delicate ears of the friend of the working-man.

"Of course!" exclaims Mr. Million, triumphantly and disdainfully. "The old cry! I knew it. The old cry! I suppose you will say presently that there is not room for all, and that there are numbers of men who are in the same position as yourself—willing to work, unable to obtain it."

Saul Fielding makes no reply; words are rushing to his tongue, but he does not utter them. But Mr. Million insists upon being answered, and repeats what he has said in such a manner and tone that Saul cannot escape.

"I think, sir, that there are many men who are forced to be idle against their will; that seems to be a necessity in all countries where population increases so fast as ours does. But I don't complain of that."

"Oh!" cries Mr. Million, opening both his eyes very wide indeed. "You don't complain of that! You are one of those glib speakers, I have no doubt, who foment dissatisfaction among the working classes, who tell them that they are downtrodden and oppressed, and that masters are fattening upon them! I should not be surprised to hear that you are a freethinker."

"No, sir, I am not that," urges Saul Fielding, exquisitely distressed at the unpromising turn the interview has taken; "nor, indeed, have I anything to complain of myself. I am too crushed and broken down, as you may see."

"But if you were not so," persists Mr. Million, growing harder as Saul grows humbler; "if you were in regular work, and in receipt of regular wages, it would be different with you—eh? You would have something to complain of then, doubtless. You would say pretty loudly that the workingman is underpaid, and you would do your best to fan the flame of discontent kept up by a few grumblers and idlers. You would do this—eh? Come, come," he adds, haughtily, seeing that Saul Fielding does not wish to answer, "you are here upon a begging petition, you know. Don't you think it will be best to answer my questions?"

"What is it you wish me to answer, sir?" asked Saul Fielding, sorrowfully.

"The question of wages. I want to ascertain whether you are one of those who think the working classes are underpaid."

Saul Fielding pauses for a moment, and in that brief time determines to be true to himself. "Jane would not have me do otherwise," he thinks.

"I think, sir," he says, firmly and respectfully, "that the working classes—by which I mean all in the land who have to work with their hands for daily bread—do not receive, as things go, a fair equivalent for their work. Their wages are not sufficient. They seem to be framed upon a basis which makes the work of eking them out, so as to make both ends meet, a harder task than the toil by which they are earned. The working-man's discontent does not spring from his work; he does that cheerfully, almost always. It springs out of the fact that the results of his work are not sufficient for comfort, and certainly not sufficient to dispel the terrible anxiety which hangs over the future, when he is ill and unable to work, perhaps, or when he and his wife are too old for work."

"Oh, indeed!" exclaims Mr. Million. "You give him a wife!"

"Yes, sir; his life would be a burden indeed without a woman's love."

Mr. Million stares loftily at Saul Fielding.

"And children, doubtless!"

"Happy he who has them! It is Nature's law; and no man can gainsay it." The theme possesses a fascination for Saul Fielding, and he continues, warmly, "I put aside, as distinctly outrageous, all that is said of the folly and wickedness of poor people marrying and having large families. This very fact, which theorists wax indignant over—theorists, mind you, who have wives and families themselves, and who, by their arguments, lay down the monstrous proposition that nature works in the blood according to the length of a man's purse—this very fact has made England strong; had it been otherwise, the nation would have been emasculated. Besides, you can't set natural feeling to the tune of theory; nor, when a man's individual happiness is concerned, can you induce him to believe in the truth of general propositions which, being carried out in his own person as one of the units, would make his very existence hateful to him."

Mr. Million opens his eyes even wider than before; such language from the lips of the ragged man before him is indeed astonishing.

"What more have you to say?" he gasps. "You will want property equally divided?"

"No, sir, indeed," interrupts Saul Fielding, daring to feel indignant, even in the presence of so rich a man, at the suggestion. "The man who makes honestly for

himself is entitled to possess and enjoy. I am no socialist."

"You would, at all events," pursues Mr. Million, "feed the working-man with a silver spoon? You would open the places of amusement for him on the Sabbath?"

"I would open some places and shut others."

"What places, now?"

"The museums, the public galleries. I would give him every chance—he has a right to it—to elevate himself during the only leisure he has."

"And in this way," demands Mr. Million, severely, "you would desecrate the Sabbath?"

For the life of him Saul Fielding cannot help saying, "A greater desecration than even that can be in your eyes takes place on the Sabbath, in places that are open in the name of the law."

"You refer to—"

"Public-houses. If they are allowed to be open, what reasonable argument can be brought against the opening of places the good influence of which is universally acknowledged? It is the withholding of these just privileges that causes much discontent and ill feeling."

This is quite enough for Mr. Million. This man, ragged, penniless, has the effrontery to tell the rich brewer to his face that he would have the public picture-galleries and museums of art opened on the Sabbath-day, and that he would shut the public-houses. Mr. Million can find no words to express his indignation. He can only say, stiffly and coldly:

"I have heard quite enough of your opinions, sir. Come to the point of your visit. You see"—pointing to the papers scattered about the table—"that I am very busy."

"I came, sir," he says, sadly, "in the hope that, seeing my distress, you would not have been disinclined to assist me—not with money, sir," he adds, swiftly, in answer to an impatient look of dissent from Mr. Million, "but with your good word. But I am afraid that I have injured my cause by the expression of my opinions."

"In what way did you expect that I could aid you?" asks Mr. Million, carelessly, as he settles himself to his papers.

"I have been especially unfortunate in my career, sir. As I told you, I am willing to work, but am unable to obtain it. If I could emigrate; if I could get into a new country, where labor is scarce, things might be better for me."

The poor man is helpless at the rich man's foot; and the rich man plays with him, as a cat with a mouse.

"Well," he says, "emigrate. The country would be well rid of such as you."

Saul Fielding takes no notice of the insult. He is not to be turned aside from his purpose, although he knows full well that he has missed his mark.

"I have no means, sir; I am poor and helpless."

"How do you propose to effect your object, then?"

"There are Government emigrant ships which take men out, I have heard, for very little—for nothing almost. A line of recommendation from you would be sufficiently powerful, I thought, to obtain me a passage."

"Doubtless, doubtless," this with a smile: "but you are a man of some perception, and having observed how utterly I disagree with your opinions—which I consider abominable and mischievous to the last degree—you can hardly expect me to give you the recommendation you ask for. May I ask, as you are a perfect stranger to me, for I have no recollection of you in any way, to what I am indebted for the honor you have done me by choosing me to give you a good character?"

"You are a public man, sir, and, I have heard, a friend to the working man. And as you had helped a friend of mine to emigrate by giving him a free passage in a ship that sails this week—"

"Stop, stop, if you please. I help a friend of yours to emigrate by giving him a free passage! I think you are mistaken."

"If you say so, sir, I must be. But this is what George Naldret gave me to understand."

"And pray who is George Naldret?" demands Mr. Million, haughtily; "and what are his reasons for emigrating?"

"George Naldret," returns Saul Fielding, in perplexity, "is almost the only friend I have in the world, and he is emigrating for the purpose of putting himself into a position to marry more quickly than his prospects here will allow him."

"As you are introducing me," says Mr. Million, with an air of supreme indifference, "to your friends, perhaps you would like also to introduce me to the young lady—or of course," with a sneer, "she is a young lady—he desires to marry."

"Her name is Sparrow—Bessie Sparrow, grand-daughter to an old grocer."

Mr. Million becomes suddenly interested, and pushes his papers aside, with an exclamation of anger.

"What name did you say?"

"Miss Bessie Sparrow."

The rich brewer ponders for a moment, evidently in no pleasant mood. Then suddenly rings a bell. A servant appears.

"Is my son in the house?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell him to come to me instantly."

Saul Fielding waits gravely. Seemingly, he also has found new food for contemplation. Presently young Mr. Million appears.

"You sent for me, sir?"

"Yes, James. Do you know this person?" with a slight wave of the hand in the direction of Saul Fielding, as toward a thing of no consequence.

Saul Fielding knows that his mission has failed, but does not resent this contemptuous reference to him. He stands, humble and watchful, before father and son.

"I have seen him," says young Mr. Million, "and I should say he is not a desirable person in this house."

"My opinion exactly. Yet, influenced by some cock-and-a-bull story, he comes here soliciting my assistance

to enable him to emigrate. The country would be well rid of him, I am sure; but of course it is out of my power to give such a person a good character to the emigration commissioners."

"Out of anybody's power," assents young Mr. Million, gayly. "To what cock-and-a-bull story do you refer?"

"He tells me—which is news to me—that I have given a free passage ticket to a friend of his, George—George—what did you say?"

"George Naldret, sir." Saul Fielding supplies the name in a manner perfectly respectful.

"Ay—George Naldret. Such a statement is in itself, of course, a falsehood. Even if I knew George Naldret, which I do not, and desired to assist him, which I do not, the fact of his being engaged to be married to any one of the name of Sparrow—a name which means disgrace in our firm, as you are aware—would be sufficient for me not to do so."

Young Mr. Million steals a look at Saul Fielding, whose face, however, is a mask; and in a hesitating voice says: "I think I can explain the matter; but it is not necessary for this person to remain. You do not know, perhaps, that he was the chief mover in a strike, a few years ago, which threatened to do mischief."

"I am not surprised to hear it," says the rich brewer; "the opinions he has expressed have prepared me for some such statement concerning him. He would desecrate the Sabbath-day by opening museums and picture galleries, and he would curtail the liberty of the subject by closing public-houses, and depriving the working-man of his beer! Monstrous! monstrous! He has nothing to say for himself, I suppose."

"No, sir," answers Saul Fielding, raising his head, and looking steadily at young Mr. Million, "except that I believed in the truth of what I told you, and that I don't know whether I am sorry or glad that I made the application to you."

The rich brewer has already touched the bell, and the servant comes into the room.

"Show this person to the door," Mr. Million says, haughtily; "and if he comes again, send for a policeman. He is a dangerous character."

Saul Fielding's lips wreath the disdainfully, but he walks out of the room, and out of the house, without a word of remonstrance. This chance has slipped from him. Where next shall he turn? He walks slowly onward until he is clear of the rich brewer's house, and then stops, casting uncertain looks about him. As a sense of his utter helplessness comes upon him, a young woman brushes past him without seeing him. He looks up. Bessie Sparrow! She is walking quickly, and seems to see nothing, seems to wish to see nothing. Without any distinct purpose in his mind, but impelled by an uncontrollable, undefinable impulse, Saul Fielding turns and follows her. A gasp of pain escapes him, as he sees her pause before Mr. Million's house. She rings the bell, and the door is opened. She hands the servant a letter, and the next moment she is in the house, shut from Saul Fielding's view. The terror that comes upon him is so great that the street and the sky swim before his eyes, and he clings to a lamp-post for support.

"Oh, George!" he groans. "Oh, my friend! How will you bear this? Good God! what bitterness there is in life even for those who have not fallen as I have done!"

CHAPTER X.

TOTTIE'S DREAM.

WHEN Tottie was put to bed, it was no wonder that she was haunted by the sweet effigy of old Ben Sparrow, and that his stomach of candied lemon peel, and his head of rich figs and currants, presented themselves to her in the most tempting shapes and forms her warm imagination could devise. As she lay in bed, looking at the rush-light in the wash-hand basin, the effigy appeared bit by bit in front of the basin until it was complete, and when it winked one of its currant eyes at her—as it actually did—the light of the candle threw a halo of glory over the form. Her eyes wandering to the mantel-shelf, she saw the effigy come out of the wall and stand in the middle of the shelf; and turning to the table, it rose from beneath it, and sat comfortably down, with its legs of cinnamon and raisins tucked under it like a tailor. When she closed her eyes she saw it loom in the center of dilating rainbow circles, and in the center of dark-colored disks, which, as they swelled to larger proportions, assumed bright borderings of color, for the express purpose of setting off more vividly the attraction of the figure. Opening her eyes drowsily, she saw the old man come down the chimney and vanish in the grate, and as he disappeared, down the chimney he came again, and continued thus to repeat himself, as it were, as if he were a regiment under full marching orders. Whichever way, indeed, Tottie's eyes turned, she saw him, until the room was full of him and his sweetness, and with his multiplied image in her mind she fell asleep.

No wonder that she dreamed of him.

Tottie and Bessie slept in the same room, and Tottie dreamed that long after she fell asleep—it must have been long after, for Bessie was in bed—she woke up suddenly. There she was, lying in bed, wide awake, in the middle of the night. The room was dark, and she could not see anything, but she could hear Bessie's soft breathing. She was not frightened, as she usually was in the dark, for her attention was completely engrossed by one feeling. A frightful craving was upon her, which every moment grew stronger and stronger. This craving had something horrible in it, which, however, she did not quite realize.

In the next room slept old Ben Sparrow, who, according to the fancy of her dream, was not made of blood and flesh and bone, but of lemon peel, fig and currants and raisins. All the sweet things in the shop had been

employed in the manufacture, and there they lay embodied in him.

Tottie knew nothing of theology; knew nothing of the value of her soul, which, without a moment's hesitation, she would have bartered for figs and candied lemon peel. And there the delicious things lay, in the very next room. If she could only get there!—perhaps he would not miss an arm or a leg.

But to eat the old man who was so kind to her! She had a dim consciousness of the wickedness of the wish, but she could not rid herself of it.

Thought Tottie, "He won't know, if he's asleep, and perhaps it won't hurt him. I know it would do me good." Her mouth watered, her eyes glistened, her fingers twitched to be at him, her stomach cried out to her. She could not withstand the temptation. Slowly and tremblingly she crept out of bed, and groped along the ground toward the door. Bessie was asleep. Everybody was asleep. The house was very quiet. Everything favored the accomplishment of the horrible deed. "Nobody will know," thought Tottie. Thoroughly engrossed in her desperate cannibalistic purpose, and with her teeth grating against each other, Tottie turned the handle of the door and opened it; but as she looked into the dark passage Ben Sparrow's door opened, and a sudden flood of light poured upon her. It so dazzled her, and terrified her, that she fled back to her bed on all fours, and scrambled upon it with a beating heart, and a face as white as a ghost's.

Sitting there glaring at the door, which she had left partly open in her fright, she saw the light steal into the room, and, flying in the midst of it, old Ben Sparrow. He was not quite as large as life, but he was ever so many times more sweet and delicious-looking. As old Ben Sparrow appeared, the room became light as day, and Tottie noticed how rich and luscious were the gigantic fig which formed his head, the candied lemon peel which formed his stomach, the raisins which clothed his legs and arms; and as for the ripeness of his dark, beady, fruity eyes, there was no form of thought that could truly express the temptation that lay in them. Ben Sparrow hovered in the air for a few moments, and then steadied himself, as it were; he stood bolt upright and, treading upon nothing, advanced slowly and solemnly, putting out one leg carefully, and setting it down firmly upon nothing before he could make up his mind to move the other. In this manner he approached Tottie, and sat down on her bed. For a little while Tottie was too frightened to speak. She held her breath, and waited with closed lips for him to say something. But as grandfather did not move or speak, her courage gradually returned, and with it her craving for some of him. She became hungrier than the most unfortunate church-mouse that ever breathed; her rapacious longing could only be satisfied in one way. Timorously she reached out her hand toward his face; he did not stir. Toward his eyes; he did not wink. Her finger touched his eye; it did not quiver—and out it came and was in her hand! Her heart throbbed with fearful ecstasy, as with averted head she put the terrible morsel in her mouth. It was delicious. She chewed it and swallowed it with infinite relish, and when it was gone, thirsted for its fellow. She looked timidly at the old man. There was a queer expression in his fig face, which the loss of one of his eyes had doubtless imparted to it. "It doesn't seem to hurt him," thought Tottie. Her eager fingers were soon close to the remaining eye, and out that came, and was disposed of in like manner. Tottie certainly never knew how good Ben Sparrow was until the present time. She had always loved him, but never so much as now. The eyeless face had a mournful expression upon it, and seemed to say, sadly, "Haden't you better take me next?" Tottie clutched it desperately. It wagged at her, and from its mace lips a murmur seemed to issue, "Oh, Tottie! Tottie! To serve me like this!" But Tottie was ravenous. No fear of consequences could stop her, now that she had tasted him and found how sweet he was. She shut her eyes nevertheless, as, in the execution of her murderous purpose, she tugged at his head, which, when she had torn from his body, she ate bit by bit with a rare and fearful enjoyment.

When she looked again at the headless figure of the old man, one of the legs moved briskly and held itself out to her, with an air of "Me next!" in the action. But Tottie, hungering for the lemon-peel stomach, disregarded the invitation. It was difficult to get the stomach off, it was so tightly fixed to its legs. When she succeeded the arms came with it, and she broke them off short at the shoulder-blade, and thought she heard a groan as she performed the cruel operation. But her heart was hardened, and she continued her feast without remorse.

How delicious it was! She was a long time disposing of it, for it was very large, but at length it was all eaten, and not a piece of candied sugar was left. As she sucked her fingers with the delight of a savage, a sense of the wickedness of what she had done came upon her. Her grandfather, who had always been so kind to her! She began to tremble and to cry.

But the arms and legs remained. They must be eaten. Something dreadful would be done to her if they were discovered in her bed; so with feverish haste she devoured the limbs. And now not a trace of the old man remained. She had devoured him from head to foot. She would never see him again—never! How dreadful the table looked, with him *not* on it! How Tottie wished she hadn't done it! She was appalled at the contemplation of her guilt, and by the thought of how she would be punished if she were found out.

In the midst of these fears the light in the room vanished, and oblivion fell upon Tottie in the darkness that followed.

CHAPTEK XI.

I CAN SEE YOU NOW KISSING HER LITTLE TOES.

The next day, being George's last day at home, was a

day of sorrow to all the humble persons interested in his career. He was to start for Liverpool by an early train on the following morning, and was to pass his last evening at Ben Sparrow's, with the old man, and Bessie and Tottie, and his mother and father. He had decided to bid Bessie good-by in her grandfather's house. Bessie was for sitting up all night, but he said, gently:

"I think, Bessie, that mother would like to have me all to herself the last hour or two. You know what mothers are! By-and-by, heart's treasure! you will have the first claim on me; but now mother looks upon me as all her own, and it will comfort her heart, dear soul! to let it be as I say."

There were tears in George's eyes as he looked down upon the face of his darling, and his heart almost fainted within him at the thought of parting from her.

And "Do you love me, Bess?" he asked for the thousandth time.

"With all my heart and soul," replied Bessie, pressing him in her arms. And so, with his head bowed down to hers, they remained in silent communion for many minutes.

They were sitting in Ben Sparrow's parlor, and the old man had left the young people by themselves, finding occupation in his shop, in the contemplation of his effigy, and in weighing up quarters of a pound of sugar. There was a woful look in Ben Sparrow's face as he stood behind his counter; times were hard with him, and his till was empty.

"Bess, darling," said George, waking up from his dream. She raised her tearful eyes to his. He kissed them. "As I kiss away your tears now, my dear, so I will try to take sorrow and trouble from you when we commence our new life."

"I know it, George; I know it," she said, and cried the more.

"But that is not what I was going to say. I was going to say this. Listen to me, dearest; if it were not for you, I shouldn't go; if it were not for you, I should stay at home and be content. For I love home, I love the dear old land, I love mother and father, and the old black cat, and the little house I was born in. And it's because of you that I am tearing myself from these dear things. I am going to earn money enough to make a home for you and me; to make you more quickly all my own, all my own! How my heart will yearn for you, dear, when I am over the seas! But it will not be for long; I will work and save, and come back soon, and then, my darling, then"—The tenderness of his tone, and the tenderness there was in the silence that followed, were a fitter and more expressive conclusion to the sentence than words could have made. "I shall say when I am in the ship, I am here for Bessie's sake. When I am among strangers, I shall think of you, and think, if I endure any hardship, that I endure it for my darling—and that will soften it, and make it sweet; it will, my dear! I shall not be able to sleep very much, Bess, and that will give me all the more hours to work—for you, my darling, for you! See here, heart's treasure: here is the purse you worked for me, round my neck. It shall never leave me—it rests upon my heart. The pretty little beads! How I love them! I shall kiss every piece of gold I put in it, and shall think I am kissing you, as I do now, dear, dearest, best! I shall live in the future. The time will soon pass, and as the ship comes back, with me in it, and with my Bessie's purse filled with chairs and tables, and pots and pans, I shall see my little girl waiting for me, thinking of me, longing to have me in her arms, as I long to have her in mine. And then, when I do come, and you start up from your chair as I open the door—Think of that moment, Bess—think of it!"

"Oh, George, George, you make me happy!"

And in such tender words they passed the next hour together, until George tore himself away to look after come tools, which he was to take with him to coin chairs and tables and pots and pans with. But if he did not wish his tools to rust, it behooved him not to bring them too close to his eyes, for his eyelashes were dewy with tears.

Now, late as it was in the day for such common folk as ours, Tottie had not yet made her appearance down stairs. The first in the morning to get up in the house was old Ben Sparrow, and while he was taking down his shutters, and sweeping his shop and setting it in order, Bessie rose and dressed and prepared the breakfast. Then, when breakfast was nearly ready, Bessie would go up stairs to dress and wash Tottie; but on this particular morning, on going to the little girl's bedside, Tottie cried and sobbed, and shammed headache, and as Tottie was not usually a lie-abed, Bessie thought it would do the child good to let her rest. And besides being as cunning as the rest of her sex, Bessie was the more inclined to humor Tottie's whim, because she knew that George would be sure to drop in early; and if Tottie were out of the way, she and her lover could have the parlor all to themselves. George being gone, however, there was no longer any reason for Tottie keeping her bed; so Bessie washed and dressed the child, and was surprised, when taking her hand to lead her down stairs, to see Tottie shrink back, and sob and cry that she didn't want to go.

"Come, be a good child, Tottie," said Bessie; "grandfather's down stairs, and he wants to play with you."

At this Tottie sobbed and sobbed, and shook her head vehemently. She knew very well that it was impossible for Ben Sparrow to be down stairs, for had she not eaten him in the night, every bone of him? She was morally convinced that there was not a bit of him left. Grandfather play with her! He would never play with her any more; she had done for him! Her fears were so great that she fancied she could feel him stirring inside of her. But although she was rebellious, she was weak, and so, shutting her eyes tight, she went into the parlor with Bessie. Then she ran tremblingly into a corner, and stood with her face to the wall, and her pinafore over her head; and there Bessie, having more

pressing cares upon her just then, left her. When Tottie, therefore, heard the old man's voice calling to her, she sobbed, "No, I never! No, I never!" and was ready to sink through the floor in her fright; and when the old man lifted her in his arms to kiss her, it was a long time before she could muster sufficient courage to open her eyes and feel his face, and his arms, and his legs, to satisfy herself that he was really real. And even after that, as if she could not believe the evidence of her senses, she crept toward him at intervals, and touched him, and pinched his legs, to make assurance doubly sure.

Ben Sparrow found it hard work to be playful to-day, and Tottie had most of her time to herself. If the anxiety depicted on his face were any criterion, his special cares and sorrows must have been of an overwhelming nature. In the afternoon young Mr. Million came in, spruce and dandified, and handsome as usual. The young gentleman was not an unrequited visitor at the little grocer's shop, and would often pop in and chat for an hour with Ben Sparrow; he would sit down in the back parlor in the most affable manner, and chat and laugh as if they were equals. Bessie was not at home when he came this afternoon, and he seemed a little disappointed; but he stopped and chatted for all that, and when he went away, the old grocer brightened, and his face looked as if a load were lifted from his heart. His brighter mood met with no response from Bessie, when she came in shortly afterward. Some new trouble seemed to have come on her since the morning—some new grief to which she hardly dared give expression. She had been stabbed by a few presumably chance and careless words spoken by a neighbor—need it be told that this neighbor was a woman? No weapon can be keener than a woman's tongue, when she chooses to use it to stab. The woman who had uttered the words was young—a year older than Bessie—and it was known at one time that she was setting her cap at Bessie's sweetheart. But she had met with no encouragement from George, who, being wrapped heart and soul in Bessie, had no eyes for other women. George often nodded a laughing assent to a favorite saying of his mother's that "One woman was enough for any man; more than enough sometimes." Mrs. Naldret would occasionally add, The stab which Bessie received shall be given in the few words that conveyed it.

"So George goes away to-morrow morning," was the woman's remark to Bessie, as she was hurrying home with heavy heart.

"Yes," sighed Bessie; "to-morrow morning."

"Ah," said the woman, "he'll be nicely cut up at leaving. I dare say he'd give a good deal if he could take some one with him."

"I am sure he would," said Bessie, thinking that by "some one" herself was meant.

"Oh, I don't mean you," said the woman, seeing the interpretation that Bessie put upon her words.

"Who do you mean, then?" asked Bessie, looking up quickly.

The woman laughed, and shrugged her shoulders.

"Well!" she exclaimed. "Some girls are blind! Thank goodness, the best man in the world couldn't blind me so!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Bessie, in an agitated tone, all the blood deserting her face. "What have you to say against George?"

The woman laughed again.

"You've no cause to be jealous, Bessie, she said, "it's only a child. But I do think, if I was George's sweetheart"—Bessie's lip curled, and this little expression made the woman's tone more venomous—"I do think," she added, with scornful emphasis, "that if I was George's sweetheart—oh, you needn't curl your lip, Bessie!—I should ask him—who—Tottie's—father—was? A woman isn't worth that"—with a snap of her finger—"if she hasn't got a spirit."

And George's discarded left Bessie white and trembling, with this wound in her heart.

Bessie looked after the woman, dazed for a few moments by the accusation conveyed in the words; then she became suddenly indignant, and the blood rushed back to her face and neck; it dyed her bosom, and she knew it and felt it, and felt the stab there also. Then she hurried home.

Ben Sparrow did not notice her agitation at first; he was too much rejoiced at the lifting of a heavy weight from him. In the morning ruin had stared him in the face; a small creditor had come down upon him; had given him twenty-four hours to pay an account which, trifling as it was, he was not possessed of. But young Mr. Million had been to see him and had saved him. He would be able to pay this hard creditor—I am ashamed to say for how trifling an amount—in the morning, and he was exultant. "I am only too glad," this young gentleman had said, "to have the opportunity of rendering a service to Bessie's grandfather." When he departed, old Ben Sparrow actually danced in his parlor, in thankfulness for the danger escaped.

"Bessie," cried Ben Sparrow as his granddaughter entered, "young Mr. Million has been here."

Bessie nodded, scarcely heeding the words.

"He's a gentleman," continued Ben Sparrow, "every inch of him; to forget the past as he does."

"What past, grandfather?" asked Bessie. "Forget what?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing, my dear," exclaimed Ben, hurriedly, and coughing as if something had come up or gone down the wrong way. "What I say is, he's a gentleman, every inch of him."

"You said that before, grandfather."

"Did I? Oh yes, of course. But I am an old man, Bessie, and you must make allowances. We can't be all bright and fresh, and always happy as my dear child is."

Bessie kissed Ben Sparrow's neck, and laid her head on his shoulder. "Always happy, grandfather? Am I always happy?"

"Of course you are, dear child, and it's na-

tural and right, and proper. Sorry and grieved, of course, because your sweetheart's going away—but he'll be back soon, never fear. And we'll talk of him every day and every night, my dear, and the time 'll fly away"—he blew a light breath—"like that! Ah, my dear! it's only the old that knows how quickly time flies!"

Bessie said nothing, but pressed closer to the old shield that had sheltered her from babyhood to womanhood.

"And now see," said the old shield, "what young Mr. Million brought for you. And you're to wear them at once, he said, and I say so too, and I promised him you would, for he's coming here to-night, and is going to do me such a kindness as only the kindest heart in the world could do."

Ben Sparrow took from his pocket a little box, and opened it, and produced therefrom a piece of tissue-paper, and from the tissue-paper a pair of pretty torquoise ear-rings, set in gold. Bessie scarcely looked at them, and allowed Ben to take from her ears the pair of old ear-rings she had worn for ever so many years, and replace them with Mr. Million's pretty present.

"You look, Bessie," said old Ben, falling back and contemplating her, "you look like a Princess! and it's my opinion, my dear, that you are every bit as good as one."

He held a piece of looking-glass before her, and desired her to look at herself. To please him she said they were very pretty, and then said, suddenly coming to what was uppermost in her mind, "Grandfather, I want you to tell me about Tottie."

"About Tottie, my dear!" exclaimed Ben Sparrow, wondering.

"Yes," replied Bessie, sitting down, "about Tottie. All I know is, that you came and asked me once, if I would mind if you brought a little friendless girl home to live with us, and if I would take care of her."

"And you said, 'Yes' gladly, for it would be company for us, and would make the place pleasant. And I'm sure neither you nor me have ever repented it. If Tottie was our own flesh and blood we couldn't be fonder of her. I shouldn't know what to do without her, now I've got so used to her. I'll tell you the story by-and-by, my dear, when George has gone."

"No," interrupted Bessie, so impetuously as to cause old Ben to jump; "now! I want to know now. Ah, dear grandfather! you have always been so good to me that I can't help being a tyrant."

"You a tyrant!" cried Ben, appealing with raised hands to the walls and the furniture to join him in the repudiation of the astonishing statement. "That's a good one, that is. Well, my dear, as you want to know at once and as you're such a tyrant—ha, ha! I can't help laughing, my dear—here goes. It's now three years gone, Bess—before George and you began to keep company, my dear—that George comes and tells me a story of a poor little thing that had been thrown helpless upon the world. 'Such a pretty little thing!' says George, 'and not a friend but me to look after her! I wish I knew some one,' says George, 'who would take care of the dear; I'm sure I could never be grateful enough to them.' Then I asked how old the child was, and whether she did not have relations. 'Yes,' said George, 'she had two, but they had no home, and were altogether in too bad a position to take care of the little one.' Then I thought of you, my dear, and thought it would be company for my Bessie and for me, and that if we grew to love the child, there would be nothing to repent of. I told George this, and George confessed that he had the same thing in his mind too, and that was the reason why he spoke to me about it—hoping that I would say what I had said. And so, to cut a long story short, one night a woman came to the door with little Tottie in her arms, and kissed the child a many times, and George brought Tottie in. I didn't see the woman's face, but I fancied that she was crying. I have often wished since that I had seen her face, the poor creature seemed in such distress. You remember, Bessie, when you came home an hour afterward, and found me sitting before the fire with Tottie in my lap, warming her little toes, how you fell in love with her directly, and how happy she made us, and how this very parlor was, because Tottie was with us, really made a great deal more cheerful than ever it had been before! You remember the wonderful dimples that came into her face when she looked at us, and broke out a-smiling, as much as to say, 'How do you do, old Ben and young Bess? I'm very glad to see you!' Why, it was as good as a play! I can see you now kissing her little toes, and can see her crowing and laughing when you kissed her neck—so fat, and so full of creases! and I can see her clinching her little fist and flourishing it in the air, as much as to say, 'In this fist I've got a hundred-pound note, and all the world and his wife sha'n't take it from me.' Dear, dear! the child has been a comfort to us, and it was a bright day when she came into the house, the poor little thing! Then George says, 'You're not to be expected to keep Tottie for nothing, Mr. Sparrow; and here's three shillings a week, and when she gets a big girl perhaps we'll be able to spare more.' And he's paid the three shillings a week regular, and has bought little things for her now and then, such as a frock, you know, or a flannel petticoat, or a little pair of shoes. And that's the whole of the story, Bess."

Bessie had listened very attentively to the narration of Tottie's history, and now said, after a pause, with a strange hesitation in her voice:

"Grandfather, did George never tell you—who—Tottie's—father—was?"

"No, my dear. I remember once it coming up between us somehow, but George turned it off, and said it didn't matter to Tottie, who seemed as happy as the day was long—and so she was, and is, my dear."

At that moment "Shop!" was called, and Ben Sparrow hurried in to attend to his customer, and the subject dropped.

CHAPTER XII.

ONE KISS FOR HOPE, ONE FOR FAITH, AND ONE FOR LOVE.

TEA was over and cleared away in the little back parlor, and Bessie and old Ben Sparrow sat looking sadly into the fire. Tottie was also present in her high chair, but there was nothing of sadness in her thoughts. She was enjoying, in anticipation, what was spread upon the table; for after the fashion of humble folk, preparations had been made for "a party" on this last evening which George was to spend with them. There was a bottle of "sherry wine" on the table, and another of port, which old Ben had bought at a large grocer's shop over Westminster Bridge, at a cost, for the two bottles, of two shillings and fourpence; and that the wine was of an old and rich vintage, was proved by the mildew and sawdust which clung to the bottles. There were six wine-glasses of different shapes and patterns; and there was a plate of almonds and raisins, and another of figs, and some small seed-cakes, and four oranges cut in quarters; so that although the table presented quite a festive appearance. There was nothing festive, however, in the countenances of Bessie and her grandfather; their faces were as sad as their thoughts. It was but natural. And yet they would have been loth to have confessed to each other the exact tenor of their contemplations.

A bustle in the shop caused Ben Sparrow to jump from his chair.

"That's Mr. and Mrs. Naldret," he said, and opened the parlor door and gave them welcome.

"Well, Bessie," said Mrs. Naldret, and "Well, my girl," said Jim Naldret; and they both kissed her, and shook hands with old Ben, who bustled about doing nothing, while Bessie assisted Mrs. Naldret to take off her bonnet and things. Mrs. Naldret had with one glance taken in the preparations for the party, and approved of them.

"What a pretty pair of ear-rings!" exclaimed Mrs. Naldret, admiring the turquoise trifles in Bessie's pink ears, and, "Well, George is a sly one!" said Jim Naldret, pinching the pretty ears.

"George didn't give them to her," said Ben Sparrow, rubbing his hands; "no, nor me either. I'm not rich enough; though if I could afford it, Bessie should have had such a pair long ago, and a gold chain and a watch as well."

"She's pretty enough to have them," said Jim Naldret.

"And good enough," added Ben. "Well, I am glad to see you! But I wish it was to welcome George back instead of wishing him good-bye. Eh, Bess?"

"Yes, grandfather," replied Bessie, with a heavy sigh.

Mrs. Naldret said nothing; she was thinking who had given Bessie the turquoise ear-rings; she knew they could not have cost less than four pounds at least.

"There's George," said Jim Naldret, as the shop door opened.

Bessie turned eagerly to the door, but Ben Sparrow stepped before her and said, in a hurried, agitated tone:

"I should like to have a few quiet words with George, my dear; I shan't have another opportunity. Mrs. Naldret won't mind."

That worthy woman nodded, and Ben Sparrow, going into the shop, stopped George's entrance into the parlor.

"Don't go in for a minute," said Ben; "I want to speak to you."

"All right, grandfather; but I must have a kiss off Bessie first. Bessie!"

The girl ran into the shop at his call, and nestled in his arms for a moment.

"There! there!" exclaimed old Ben, taking Bessie's hand gently and kindly. "Go inside, Bess, my dear. That's all George wanted with you. We'll be in presently."

Bessie went into the parlor, and George's heart was like a nest from which the dearly loved bird had flown. That little embrace, with Bessie, warm and soft and tender, in his arms, contained such exquisite happiness as to be painful.

"I'll not keep you two minutes," said Ben Sparrow; "come to the door, so that we may not be heard."

They went to the shop door, and into the street, which they paced slowly as they conversed.

"As I was sitting inside by the fire just now, George," resumed Ben, "there came into my mind something which I think I ought to speak of before you go away. It brought back old time memories, too. You see, my dear boy, I am an old man, and there's no telling what may happen. It is a comfort to me that Bessie will have a good man for a husband—for I believe you to be good, and—and a man, George!"

"Indeed, Mr. Sparrow, I will do my best. It will be my happiness to make her happy."

"I believe it will be, George, and that's why I'm glad she will be yours. I have nothing to give her, George, nothing. I am so poor that I don't know which way to turn sometimes to pay little bills."

"I want nothing with her, Mr. Sparrow. I want no better fortune than Bessie herself."

He was overflowing with love for his dear girl.

"She's good enough to be a Princess," said Ben, proudly, "good enough to be a Queen."

"She's my Princess and my Queen," replied George; "and she's a good girl and will be a good wife, and that's better than all."

"That it is—that it is. But don't interrupt me, George. I thought once I should be better off than I am, but something went wrong with me, and I lost all my little savings. Since then, I have been going down, till sometimes I think I can't go down any lower." Old Ben Sparrow paused here, and before he resumed closed his eyes, and put his hand over them, as if with his inner sense of sight he were looking into the past.

"George, I am going to speak of Bessie's father—and my

son; it is only right that I should, for you may meet him."

"Meet him, Mr. Sparrow!"

"Yes," replied the old man, in a quiet tone. "I dare say you have heard that he ran away, years ago, in disgrace. Bessie was quite a little thing then, and I don't think any one has been so unkind as to speak of it to her. To tell you the truth, George, she believed years ago that her father was dead, and it is best she should not be told different. And he may be dead, George, for all I know. He was employed as one of old Mr. Million's collectors, and he used money that didn't belong to him. He used my money, too, and put my name to papers without my knowing; so that when he ran away, to prevent something worse happening, I had to pay, which brought me down, and kept me down, George. This is a solemn secret between us, George, and must never again be spoken of."

"I understand, sir."

"But I thought it right that you should know before you go away. It don't alter your opinion of Bessie, does it, George? does it, my boy?"

"Alter my opinion of Bessie!" exclaimed George, warmly. "It gives her a greater claim on me. I love her more for it, dear girl, knowing how unhappy it would cause her to know this. Of course it must be kept from her!"

"Dear boy, God bless you! God-bless you, dear boy!" cried old Ben Sparrow, with the tears running down his face. "And, George—when you make a little money, and come home with it to make Bessie happy, be contented. Don't go striving after riches, as my son did, and forget the meaning of honesty, and the happiness there is in contentment. From the time he ran away I have never had a line from him. But I heard that he was seen in Australia, and if he is alive you may meet him, for there are not many people there. Strange things do happen, George! You may meet him, and know him. I dare say he has grown something like me, but taller and more gentlemanly. Ah, that was his ruin, wanting to be a gentleman! Well, if you do meet him, George," and the old man took George's hand and pressed it hard, and twined his fingers with George's nervously—"if you do, give him—my—my love, George—my dear love—and tell him to write to me, and that his old father forgives him, George—that he forgives him! And tell him about you and Bessie, and how beautiful Bessie has grown, and how she's fit to be a Princess!" Old Ben broke down here, and George put his arm round the old man's neck, and patted him on the back, and said, "Yes, yes, Mr. Sparrow, I understand, I understand. I'll do all that you wish and in the way that you wish. And now that I know, I'll look out for him. What part of Australia do you think he's in?"

"I don't know, George; but Australia can't be very large. I've done right to tell you, George, haven't I?"

"Yes, quite right."

With that they went into the house, and joined the party in the parlor. It was not a very merry one, and the conversation chiefly consisted of tender reminiscences and hopeful anticipation. George tried to be gay, but broke down, and if it had not been for old Ben Sparrow chirruping out a line of "Cheer, boys, cheer, there's wealth for honest labor," now and then, it would have been difficult to keep matters going. But a diversion was occasioned in the course of the evening by the arrival of young Mr. Million, who came in to shake hands with George, he said, and to wish him good-bye.

George was sitting in the corner, with Tottie on his knee. The child was in a state of repletion, having feasted her full on the pleasures of the table, and was curled up in George's arms, feeling very sleepy. Bessie, sitting next to George (he had a spare arm for her waist, Tottie notwithstanding), cast strangely disturbed glances at her lover and the child, and her heart was bleeding from the wound inflicted upon it by what she had heard that afternoon.

Every time George stooped and kissed Tottie, Bessie's wound opened, and she was almost distracted with doubt, and grief, and love.

Young Mr. Million was very sunny and bright—a sunbeam lighting up the sad clouds. He gave just a glance at the ear-rings in Bessie's ears, and Bessie blushed as she rose to allow George to shake hands with him. No one saw the glance but Mrs. Naldret, and she looked gravely at Bessie.

Young Mr. Million was profuse in his good wishes for George. He wished the young man all sorts of luck, and hoped he would soon be back.

Every one was gratified at the heartiness with which young Mr. Million expressed his good wishes—every one but Mrs. Naldret; but, then, nothing seemed to please her to-night.

"I must drink your health, George," said the young brewer.

Ben Sparrow asked him, with a grand air, whether he would take sherry wine or port, and he chose sherry, and said that Miss Sparrow should fill his glass for him.

Bessie filled his glass and handed it to him with a bright flame in her cheeks; her hand shook, too, and a few drops of wine were spilled upon the table, which young Mr. Million said, gayly, was a good omen.

"And here's good luck to you, George, and a prosperous voyage," he said, and shook hands with George, and wished him good-bye, and shook hands also with all in the room.

Old Ben Sparrow looked at him very anxiously, and when the young prince, with a quietly significant glance at the old man, proposed that Miss Sparrow should open the shop door for him, Ben said, "Yes, yes, certainly, sir," and almost pushed Bessie into the shop.

Now, what made Mrs. Naldret open the parlor door, and seat herself so that she could see the shop door? It may have been done unconsciously, but certain it is that, seeing something pass between young Mr. Million and Bessie as they shook hands at the shop door, she gave a sudden cry, as if overtaken by a spasm.

Bessie ran in at the cry, and then Mrs. Naldret sat in one quick flash, what no one else saw (for Bessie slipped it into her pocket), a letter in Bessie's hand.

The matron said it was nothing, merely a stitch in her side, and turned from the maid to her son, around whose neck she threw her arms, and kissed him again and again.

"Why, mother!" exclaimed George, for Mrs. Naldret was beginning to sob convulsively. "Come, bear up, there's a dear soul! or we shall all be as bad as you!"

Mrs. Naldret repressed her sobs, and pressed him closer to her faithful breast, and whispered:

"Ah, George, there are a many women in the world for you, but there's only one mother!"

He whispered back to her, "There's only one woman in the world for me, and that's my darling Bessie; and there is only one other who is as good as she is, and that's the mother I hold in my arms."

And all she could reply to this was, "Oh, George, George! Oh, my dear, dear boy!" with a world of love and pity in her voice.

And so the sad evening passed away, until George said, "Hadn't father and mother better go home? He would soon be with them. They knew that he wanted to say good-bye to Bessie, who sat pale and tearful, with her hand in his; and they rose to go, saying he would find them up when he came home."

"I know that, dear mother and father," he said, and went with them to the door, and kissed them, and came back with the tears running down his face.

"I'll tell you what, George," whispered old Ben Sparrow in George's ear. "You shall say good-bye to Tottie and me, and we'll go to bed; and then you'll have Bessie all to yourself. But don't keep too long, my dear boy, don't keep too long."

Tottie had been fast asleep for more than an hour, and George took her in his arms, without waking her.

"Good-bye, Tottie," he said, "good-bye, little one!" He kissed her many times, and the child, stirred by his caresses, raised her pretty little hand to his face. He kissed her fingers, and then resigned her to old Ben, who, with his burden in his arms, grasped George's hand tight, and bade him good-bye and God-speed.

"And don't forget, George," he said, with a secret look toward Bessie.

"No, Mr. Sparrow," George replied, "I'll bear in mind what you told me."

"God bless you, then, and speed you back."

With this the old man ascended the stairs, with Tottie in his arms, turning over his shoulder to give George a parting look, and humming "Cheer, boys, cheer!" softly, to keep up the spirit of the lovers.

They had listened with a kind of strained attention to the old man's voice, and when it was hushed, and silence fell upon them, George turned to Bessie, and in an instant she was in his arms, lying on his breast. A long silence followed. George heard Bessie's heart beat plainer than the tick of the old-fashioned clock, which stood like a ghost in a corner of the room. Not another sound could be heard but the ticking of the old clock and the beating of their hearts. As Bessie lay in her lover's arms, she thought whether it would be generous in her to question him about Tottie. The very asking of the question would imply a doubt. A voice whispered to her, "Trust him; perfect love means perfect confidence." But the woman's words were present to her also; and George was paying for the child. She would not admit the thought of anything dishonorable in George; but the sting of the doubt was in her. Would it not be better for her to ask a simple question, which George could easily answer, than to be tormented with doubt during the long months he would be away from her? Would it not be simple justice to Tottie? for if she were not satisfied, she might grow to hate the child. And Bessie really loved the pretty little forsaken one. The maternal instinct was in her, like the seedling of a flower in the ground, waiting for the summer-time to ripen it into the perfect beauty of motherly love. She loved children.

And here a word. Whether out of place or not, it must be written. Trust not that woman who has no love for little ones. She is unworthy of love.

How long the lovers remained silent they did not know. But the time flew all too swiftly, for the solemn tongue of Westminster proclaimed the hour. Each clang was like a knell. It was midnight.

Midnight! What solemn reflections arise at such a moment, if the mind be attuned to them! If the world were spread before us like a map, what varied emotion and feeling, what unworthy striving, what unmerited suffering, what new lives born to pain, what old lives dying out in it; what thoughts dark and bright, what flowers of tender love, what weeds of ruthless circumstance, what souls born in the mire and kept there, what hope, what remorse, what sounds of woe and pleasant fountain voices with sparkles in them, what angel-lights and divine touches of compassion, would, in the brief space occupied by the striking of the hour, there be displayed! And so that bell may toll, night after night, for generation after generation, until a time shall come—say in a hundred years—when every human pulse that at this moment beats throughout the world, when every heart that thrills and thirsts, when every vainful mortal that struts and boasts and makes grand schemes for self's exaltment, shall lie dead in earth and seal! Such thoughts should make us humble.

The bell awoke the lovers from their dream, and they spoke in low tones of the future, and the hopes that lay in it for them.

"When I come back with a little bit of money, my darling," said George, "I shall be content to settle down to my trade, and we shall jog along as happy as can be. We couldn't settle down without pots and pans, and these I am going away to earn. I can see our little home, with you sitting by the fireside, or waiting at the door for me to give me a kiss when my day's work is done. Then I shall come round to mother's old way, with her bread-and-cheese and kisses. That will be

good enough for me, my darling, with you to give me the kisses."

And he gave and took an earnest of them there and then.

So they talked of one thing and another until one o'clock was tolled by the Westminster bell, and during all that time Bessie had not found courage to speak of what was in her mind. George had noticed the earrings in Bessie's ears, but had not spoken of them, thinking that Bessie would have drawn his attention to them. But Bessie's wound was too fresh; the pain and bewilderment of it were all engrossing. She had no thought for anything else.

"And now I must go, my darling," said George, as they stood by the shop door; "for mother and father are waiting for me." He took her face between his hands and kissed her lips. "One kiss for hope; one for faith; and one for love."

Bessie raised her face again to his, and whispered as she kissed:

"And one for confidence."

"And one for confidence," he repeated, as heartily as his sadness would allow.

"There should be no secrets between us, George,"

"Certainly there should not be, darling," he replied, "though you've been keeping one from me all the night, you puss!"

"I, George!"

"Yes, you, dearest. You have never told me who gave you those pretty ear-rings."

Upon such slight threads often do our dearest hopes hang! Bessie, yielding to the weak impulse, to play off confidence for confidence, said:

"Never mind those, George. I want to ask you something first."

At this moment the sound of music came to them, and the waits commenced to play the dear old air of "Home, sweet home."

"That's Saul's doing," thought George. "Good fellow! What will become of him during the time I am away?" As he and Bessie stood linked in a close embrace, the soft strains floated through the air into their hearts.

"There shall be no secrets between us, George, in our own home—sweet home!"

"None, darling!"

"And you'll not be angry with me for saying something?"

"What can my dear girl say to make me angry? and at such a time!"

"Then tell me, George—about Tottie."

"The dear little thing! What about her, dearest?"

"George, is she an orphan?"

How long seemed the interval before he replied! Tick—tick—went the clock, so slowly! Oh, so slowly, now!

"No, Bessie."

How strangely his voice sounded! But he held her closer to him, and she had no power to free herself from his embrace. Indeed, she would have fallen had he loosed her.

"Do not be angry with me, George," she whispered, slowly and painfully. "She has a father living?"

Another long, long pause, and then, "Yes," from George, in the same strange tone.

"Tell me his name, George."

He held her from him suddenly, and, with his hands upon her shoulder, looked her steadily in the face. But her eyes drooped in the light of his earnest gaze.

"I cannot, Bessie," he said, "I must not. When we are married I will tell you all. There shall be no secrets between us in our home—sweet home. Till then, be satisfied."

Softer came the dear old air to Bessie's ears. But the tender meaning in it was gone for her. She turned from her lover petulantly.

"I did not think you would refuse me this, George."

Wiser, stronger, than she, he said:

"Do not let this trivial matter come between us, my dear; and would have taken her to his heart again, but she did not meet him as before. "This trivial matter!" Was he so lost to honor and to love for her? Something of her mind he saw in her face, and it made his blood hot. "Good God," he thought, "is it possible she suspects me?" Then he strove to soothe her, but she would not be soothed. She said but little now; but her face was white with misery; doubt tore at the wound in her heart. She knew the pain she was inflicting upon him by the pain she felt herself. But she could not yield; she could not say, "I know you are true to me, I will be satisfied, and will wait." So his efforts were vain, and two o'clock struck, and their agony was not over. The tolling of the bell, however, brought to him the picture of his father and mother waiting up at home for him. "I must go," he said, hurriedly. "Good-bye, dear Bessie, and God bless you! Trust to me, and believe that no girl ever had more faithful lover."

In spite of her coldness, he pressed her close to his breast and whispered assurance of his love and faithfulness. Then tore himself away, and left her almost fainting in the shop, love and doubt fighting a sickening battle in her heart.

CHAPTER XIII.

YOU ALONE, AND MY MOTHER ARE TRUE; ALL THE REST OF THE WORLD IS FALSE.

THE night was very cold, and George felt the keen wind a relief. He took off his hat, and looked around. The street was still and quiet; the last strain of "Home, sweet home," had been played, and the players had departed. All but one, and he waited at the end of the street for George to come up to him.

"What, Saul!"

"George!"

They clasped hands.

"I am glad you are here, Saul. I should not have liked to go without wishing you good-bye."

"I waited for you, George. I knew you were in there. Mother and father sitting up for you, I suppose?"

"Yes. In a few hours I shall go from here; then I shall be alone!"

"As I am, George."

"Nay, Saul, you have Jane."

"She has left me, dear woman. I may never see her face again. It is for my good, George, that she has done this. You do not know how low we have sunk, George," and here his voice fell to a whisper, "at times we have been almost starving? It could not go on like this, and she has left me, and taken service somewhere in the country. She has done right. As I suffer, as I stretch out my arms in vain for her, as I look round the walls of my garret and am desolate in the light of my misery, I feel and confess that she has done right. Here is her letter. Come to the lamp; there is light enough to read it by."

George read the letter, and returned it to Saul, saying, "Yes, she is right. What do you intend to do?"

"God knows. To try if I can see any way. But all is dark before me now, George."

"I wish I could help you, Saul."

"I know, I know. You are my only friend. If it ever be in my power to repay you for what you have done"—He dashed the tears from his eyes, and stood silent for a few minutes, holding George's hand in his. "George," he said, in unsteady tones, "in times gone by you and I have had many good conversations; we passed happy hours together. Words that have passed between us are in my mind now."

"In mine too, Saul."

"We had once," continued Saul, in the same strange, unsteady tones, "a conversation on friendship. I remember it well, and the night on which it took place. We walked up and down Westminster Bridge, and stopped now and then, gazing at the lights on the water. There is something grand and solemn in that sight, George: I do not know why, but it always brings to my mind a dim idea of death and immortality. The lights stretch out and out, smaller and smaller, until not a glimmer can be seen; darkness succeeds them as death does life. But the lights are there, George, although our vision is too limited to see them. You remember that conversation, George?"

"As if it has taken place this night, Saul. I can see the lights, and the darkness that follows them."

"We agreed then upon the quality of friendship, but gave utterance to many generalities." Saul paused a while, and then said, slowly, "I am considering, George, whether I rightly understand the duties that lie in friendship."

"Faithfulness, trustfulness."

"Yes, those; and other things as well. Say that you had a friend, and had learned something, had seen something, of which he is ignorant, and which he should know; say it is something that you would keep from your friend if you were false instead of true to him."

"I should be a traitor to friendship," interrupted George, warmly, "if I kept it from him. If I were truly his friend, I should seek him out and say what I had learned, what I had seen."

"Even if it contained pain, George; even if it would hurt him to know?"

"Even if it contained pain; even if it would hurt him to know. There is often pain in friendship; there is often pain in love. You have felt this, Saul, yourself. I have too, dear friend! Often into life's sweetness and tenderness pain creeps, and we do not know how it got there."

George uttered this in a gentle tone; he was thinking of Bessie. "Come, friend," he said, seeing that Saul hesitated to speak, "you have something to tell your friend. If you are true to him, tell it."

Thus urged, Saul said: "First answer me this: When did you first think of emigrating?"

"I did not think of it at all before it was put in my head."

"By whom?"

"By young Mr. Million. One night, not very long ago now, he met me, and got into conversation with me. Trade had been a little slack and I had had a few idle days. This made me fret, for I saw that if things went on in the same way it might be years before I could save enough to buy furniture to make a home for Bessie. I let this out in conversation with young Mr. Million, and he sympathized with me, and said it was a shame, but that if he were in my place he would put himself in a position to marry his sweetheart in less than a year. How? I asked. By emigrating, he said. It staggered me, as you may guess, Saul. The idea of going away had never entered my head. He went on to say that his father took a great interest in working-men, and was very interested also in emigration; that only that morning his father had mentioned my name, and had said that he had a passage ticket for the very ship that is going out of the Mersey to-morrow, Saul—and that if I had a mind to better myself he would give the ticket to me. I thanked him, and told him I would think of it. Well, I did think of it, and I read about wages over the water, and saw that I could do what he said. He gave me the ticket, and that's how it came about."

"George," said Saul, pityingly, for things that were at present dark to George seemed clear to him, "Mr. Million never heard your name until this morning."

"Stop!" exclaimed George, passing his hand over his eyes with a bewildered air. "Speak slowly. I don't know that I understand you. Say that again."

Saul repeated:

"Mr. Million never heard your name until this morning. I went to his house, thinking that as he helped you he might help me; and he scolded at me, and taunted me bitterly. He had no more to do with getting your ticket than I had. Every word young Mr. Million told you about the passage and about his father was false."

"Good God!" cried George. "What could be his motive then in telling me these things, and in obtaining this passage ticket for me?"

"Think, George," said Saul; "there is such a thing as false kindness. He may have a motive in wishing you away. I could say more, but I cannot bring my tongue to utter it."

"You must, Saul, you must!" cried George, in a voice that rang through the streets.

They had walked as they conversed, and they were now standing outside his mother's house.

"You must! By the friendship I have borne for you! By the memory of what I have done for you!"

The door of his house was opened as he spoke. His mother had heard his voice, and the agony in it, and came to the door. George saw her standing there, looking anxiously toward him, and he said, in a voice thick with pain:

"Stay here until I come out. By the love you bear to Jane, stop until I come. My mother will know; she is far-seeing, and I may have been blind."

He hurried to his mother, and went into the house with her. For full half an hour Saul waited in suspense, and at the end of that time George came out of the house, staggering like a drunken man. Saul caught him, and held him up. His face was as the face of death; a strong agony dwelt in it.

"I have heard something," he said, in a tone that trembled with passion and pain, and weakness. "My mother has doubted for a long time past. She took a letter from him secretly to-night. Those ear-rings she wore he gave her. Oh, my God! Tell me, you, what more you know. By the memory of all you held dear, tell me!"

"George, my dear," said Saul, in a broken voice, "a few moments after I quitted Mr. Million's house I saw her enter it."

A long silence followed. The stars and the moon shone brightly, but there was no light in the heavens for George. A sob broke from him, and another, and another.

"For God's sake!" exclaimed Saul, "for your mother's sake, who suffers now a grief as I can see yours, hear up! Dear friend, if I could lay down my life for you I would."

"I know it. You alone, and my mother, are true; all the rest of the world is false! He wished to get rid of me, did he, and this was a trap! The false, lying dog! But when I meet him—see here! Here is the ticket he gave me. If I had him before me now, I would do to him as I do to this!"

He crumbled the paper in his hand, and tore it fiercely in twain. Saul caught his arm, and stayed its destruction.

"No, no, George!" he cried, but his cry was like a whisper. "Don't destroy it! Give it, oh, give it to me! Remember the letter that Jane wrote to me. Think of the future that is open to me, to her, unless I can see a way. The way is here! Here is my salvation! Let me go instead of you!" He fell upon his knees and raised his hands tremblingly, as if the Death-Angel were before him, and he was not prepared. "If I live, I will repay you, so help me, the Great God!"

George muttered, "Take it. For me it is useless. May it bring you the happiness that I have lost!"

Saul kissed his friend's hand, which fell from his grasp. When he looked up, his friend was gone. And the light in the heavens, that George could not see, shone on the face of the kneeling man.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

THEY SAW, UPON ONE OF THE NEAREST PEAKS, A MAN STANDING, WITH SUNSET COLORS ALL AROUND HIM.

WE are in the land of a thousand hills. Height is piled upon height, range upon range. The white crests of the mountains cut sharp lines in the clear cold air, and the few trees that are dotted about stand like sentinels on the watch. On one of the far heights, some trees, standing in a line, look like soldiers that have halted for rest, and the clumps or bush that lie in the valleys and on the sides of the hills are like wearied regiments sleeping.

In dear old England the roses are blooming, and the sun is shining; but here it is night, and snow shadows rest on the mountains and gullies. Among the seemingly interminable ranges ice-peaks glitter like diamond eyes. Round about us where we stand there is but little wood growth; but in the far distance, beyond the eye's reach, are forests of trees, from the branches of which garlands of icicles hang fantastically; and down in the depths the beautiful fern leaves are rimmed with frosted snow. We are in the New World.

Creation might have been but yesterday. Even these white canvas tents, lying in the lap of Night, in the centre of the forest of peaks, do not dispel the illusion. They are clustered in the saddle of a gully almost hidden from sight by jealous upland. But look within, and you will see that the Old World is marching on to the New. Sturdy men, asleep upon canvas beds, are resting from their toil. Some are from old Devon, England's garden land; some from the Cornwall mines; some from the mother-land's fevered cities. Rest, tired workers! Sleep for a little while, strong, brown-bearded men! Over your spirits, as you dream, and sometimes smile, it may be that the eternal light of a new childhood is slowly breaking!

Hark! What cry is this, that reaches the ear? Come nearer. A baby's voice! And now we can hear the soft voice of the mother singing her child to sleep with an old familiar nursery rhyme. Dear words! Dear memories! Sweet thread of life! When it snaps, the world is dark, and its tenderness and beauty have departed from our souls. The mother's soft voice is like a rain dancing down a hill in the sun's eye. How sweet its sounds!

What brings these men, women and children here

among the wilds? For answer, take—briefly told—what is not a legend, but veritable New-World history.

Two men, adventurers from the Old World, attracted thence by the news of gold discoveries, traveled into new country in search of an El Dorado which they could keep to themselves until their fortunes were made. They traveled over mountain and plain, and searched here and there, for weeks and months without success, until, almost starving and penniless, they found themselves on the banks of a swiftly-flowing river. This river, here wide, here narrow, here confined between rocky precipices, here widening on the plains, presented strange contrasts during the year. In the winter, the mountain snows which fed it came tumbling furiously over the rocks; then its waters rushed maddly through the defiles and overflowed the plains. In the summer peace came to it; the warm sun made it drowsy, and it fell asleep. It curled itself up in its bed, as it were, and left its banks bare and dry. The snow torrents from the mountains brought with them something rarer than snow—gold. The precious metal grew in the mountain rocks, and when the furious water tore it from its home, and carried it to the river it sank into the river's bed and banks, and enriched every fissure and crevice in its stony bottom. When the two adventurers camped by the river's side it was summer, and the banks were dry. They tried for gold, and found it. In a few hours they unearthed twenty ounces, and they looked at each other with wild eyes. Not a soul was within many miles of them; only the birds and the insects knew their secret. But they could not work without food. Some twenty miles from the scene of their discovery was a sheep-farming station. Thither they walked in the night, so they might not be observed, and slept during the day. Pleading poverty they bought at the station a little meat and flour, and walked in the daylight away from the river. But when night fell they warily retraced their steps, and crept through the dark like thieves, until they came to the precious banks. For weeks and months they worked in secret, and lived like misers, never daring to light a fire, for fear the smoke might be seen; the very wind was their enemy. Their flesh wasted; their faces became haggard; their hair grew tangled and matted; they became hollow-eyed; and when, after many months of suffering, they had amassed as much pure gold as they could carry, they walked painfully and wearily through bush and plain for a hundred and sixty miles, until they came to a city with a few thousand inhabitants, where, skeletons among men, they told their story, and for the first time showed their treasure. Delirium seized the city; men became almost frantic with excitement; and the next day half the inhabitants were making preparations to journey to Tom Tiddler's ground. Surely enough, the river's banks proved a veritable gold mine; and after a time fresh discoveries were made. Came there one day a man, almost dead, from the snow mountains, with lumps of gold in his pockets; but the perils of those regions were great, and men thought twice before they ventured. Life, after all, is more precious than gold. Some adventurers went forth, and never returned to tell their story. Then it was said that they were killed by starvation, not by the perils of the weather, or because they had no guns, and tents, and blankets with them. Said some—"Let us take food sufficient for months, and whatever else is necessary." They took more; they took wives, those who had them. Believe me, woman was worth more than her weight in gold. So in the summer they went into Campbell's Ranges, and pitched their tents there. And those they left behind them, wrapped in their eager hunt for gold, forgot them for a time. The town nearest to the Ranges was many miles away; it was composed of a couple of score of tents and huts, and perhaps two hundred persons lived there. Wandered into it, looking about him strangely, wistfully—for Old-World's ways were upon him, and Old-World thoughts were stirring in his mind—a man, tall, blue-eyed, strong. No man is long a stranger in the New World, and this wayfarer talked to one and another, and heard from a butcher the story of the two adventurers working on the river's banks until they were worn to skin and bone.

"But they got gold!" exclaimed the new-comer.

"Almost more than they could carry," was the answer.

The man looked about him restlessly; the eager longing of his soul was for gold, but in him it was no base craving.

"If one could get into the mountains, now," he said, "where the gold comes from!"

Said the butcher:

"Some went, and didn't come back."

"They lie over there?" said the man, looking toward the hills.

"Aye," replied the butcher, "them's Campbell's Ranges. There's a party prospecting there now, I've heard. They'll get gold, sure; but it requires courage."

"Courage!" exclaimed the man, not scornfully and arrogantly, but sweetly and gently. "Who dares not, deserves not. And when a great thing is at stake—! Thank you, mate. Good-day!"

And then he walked in the direction of Campbell's Ranges, stopping to buy a little flour on his way. He could not afford much; his means were very small.

The rough diggers often spoke among themselves of the manner of his first coming to them. They were working in the gullies, which were rich with gold; some were burrowing at the bottom of their mines, some were standing by the windlasses, hauling up the precious dirt. They had been working so from sunrise, and their hearts were light; for the future was as glowing as the bright colors of the sun were when they turned out to work—as glowing as the beautiful colors in the sky were now. It was sunset. The gold-diggers standing in the sun's light, with strong chests partly bared, with strong arms wholly so, were working with a will. Now and then snatches of song burst from their lips; now and then jests and good-humored words were

hung from one to the other. The women were busy outside their tents, lighting fires to prepare for supper; three or four children were playing with a goat and a dog; a cat—yes, a cat!—stepped cautiously out of a tent, and gazed solemnly about. And all around them and above them were the grand hills and mountains, stretching for miles on every side. It was a wonderful life amidst wonderful scenes. Close contact with the grandeur of nature and with its sublime influences humanized many of the rough men, and melted them to awe and tenderness. The hills were full of echoes; when the thunder came, the titanic hollows sent the news forth and brought it back again: it was like God's voice speaking with eternal majesty. As the diggers looked up from their work, they saw, upon one of their nearest peaks, a man standing, with sunset colors all around him.

CHAPTER II.

MORE PRECIOUS THAN GOLD, PURER THAN DIAMONDS, ARE THESE SWEET AND DELICATE WAYS.

THEIR first thought was, "Is he alone? Are there more behind him?" for they were jealous of being overwhelmed by numbers. He looked down upon the busy workers, and with slow and painful steps came across the hills, and down the valley toward them. Pale, patient-looking, foot-sore, ragged, and with deep lines on his face, he stood in the midst of them, a stranger among the hills.

"Are these Campbell's Ranges?" he asked, humbly.

"Yes, mate."

The man who answered him had just emptied a bucket of fresh dug earth on to a little hillock by the side of his mine. The stranger saw specks of gold among it. There was no envy in the look that came into his eyes. It was like a prayer.

"Where do you come from?" asked the gold-digger.

The stranger mentioned the name of the town.

"Did you come in search of us?"

"I heard that there was a party of men working in Campbell's Ranges, and that there was plenty of gold here; so I came."

"By yourself?"

"By myself. I know no one. I have been but a short time in the colony."

"You have no tent?"

"I had no money to buy one."

He murmured these words in so soft a tone that the gold-digger did not hear them.

"No blankets?"

"For the same reason."

Again he murmured the reply, so that the questioner did not know his destitute condition.

"No pick or shovel?"

The stranger shook his head sadly, and was turning away, when the gold-digger said:

"Well, mate, the place is open to all; but we want to keep ourselves as quiet as possible."

"I shall tell no one."

He turned from the worker, and sat himself upon the ground at a short distance from the human hive, out of hearing. The gold-diggers spoke to one another, and looked at him, but made no advance toward him. The women also raised their heads and cast many a curious glance at the stranger, who sat apart from them. He, on his part, sent many a wistful glance in their direction, and watched the fires and the children playing. Behind the hills sank the sun, and night drained the fiery peaks of every drop of blood. Before the hills grew white the gold-diggers left off work, and, contrary to their usual custom, took their buckets and tools to their tents, and took the ropes from their windlasses. There was a stranger near them.

"He seems decent," said the women.

"You can never tell," replied the men, shaking their heads in doubt.

Now and then they came from their tents to see if the stranger were still there. He had not moved. It was from no want of humanity that they did not call him, and offer him food and a shelter. How did they know that he did not belong to a party of bush-rangers, whose object was plunder? They let off their fire-arms and reloaded them: But if they had known this man's heart and mind; if they had known that he was penniless, friendless, that his feet were sore, and that he had not tasted food since yesterday; if they had known the trouble of his soul, and the dim hope which kept up his heart and his strength—they would have played the part of good Samaritans without a moment's hesitation. The darker shadows came down upon the valleys, and wrapped the man and his misery from their gaze and comprehension. They could see the faint outline of his form—nothing more. What were his thoughts during this time? "They suspect me; it is natural. If I can keep my strength, I may find gold to-morrow, and then they will sell me food, perhaps. If not—there are women among them. I may be able to touch their hearts." He gazed around and above him—at the solemn hills, at the solemn sky, and thought, "For myself I should be content to die here, and now. But for her—for her! Give me strength, great God—sustain me!" He knelt, and buried his face in his hands; and when the moon rose, as it did soon after, it shone upon his form. A woman, standing at the door of her tent, was the first to see him in his attitude of supplication. She hurried in to her husband, who was nursing a little daughter on his knee.

"David," she said, "that man is praying. There can be no harm, and he has no shelter. He may be in want of food."

"Poor man!" said the little daughter.

The father lifted her gently from his knee, and went out without a word. The touch of a hand upon his shoulder roused the stranger, and he looked into David's face.

"What are you doing?" asked David.

"Praying."

"For what?"

"For strength, for comfort. I need both. Turn your face from me! I am breaking down!"

A great sob came from the stranger's heart. David, with averted face, stood steady and silent for full five minutes. Then placed his hand upon the stranger's shoulder and spoke:

"Come with me. I can give you a shelter to-night. My wife sent me to you."

"God bless her!"

"Amen. Come, mate."

The stranger rose, and they walked together to the tent, where the woman and child awaited them. The stranger took off his cap—it was in tatters—and looked at the woman and her child, and stooped and kissed the little girl, who put her hand on his face, and said, piteously:

"Poor man! Are you hungry?"

"Yes, my child."

That the man and the woman should turn their backs suddenly upon him and make a perfectly unnecessary clatter, and become unnecessarily busy, touched the stranger's sensitive heart, and the unspoken words were in his mind, "God be thanked! There is much good in the world."

More precious than gold, purer than diamonds, are these sweet and delicate ways.

"Now, David," cried the woman, briskly, "supper's ready."

And David and his wife, notwithstanding that they had made their meal an hour ago, sat down with the stranger, and ate and drank with him. When supper was over David said:

"We'll not talk to-night; you must be tired. You slept out last night, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"And without a blanket, I'll bet?"

"Yes."

"A good night's rest will do you good."

Upon this hint his wife brought some blankets, and gave them to the stranger. She and her husband and child slept in the back part of the small tent, the wall of division being strips of green baize. Before turning in, David said:

"You had best have a look round you in the morning; I can lend you a pick and shovel. My name's David."

"Mine is Saul Fielding."

By his patience and gentleness he soon made his way to the hearts of the residents in this small colony. First, the children loved him; the liking of the mothers followed naturally; and within a month every man there was his friend. Love is not hard to win. Try, you who doubt. Try, with gentleness and kindness, and with charitable heart.

It is full three months after Saul Fielding's introduction to the small settlement in Campbell's Ranges. Of human beings there are fifty souls, all told. Four women—wives—seven children, and thirty-nine men. Of other living creatures there are at least a dozen dogs (what is your gold field without its dogs?), three goats, wise, as all goats are, in their generation, a large number of poultry (some of them in the shell), and a cat. The shade of Whittington would rejoice if it knew that this cat cost an ounce of gold—and a pinch over.

It is June and winter, and the snow season is in its meridian. The workers are snowbound: the heights all around them are more than man-deep in snow. But they have no fear. They have made wise preparations for the coming of the enemy, and up to the present time they have escaped hurt. They have wood and provisions to last them for full six months. That they are cut off from the world for a time daunts them not. Their courage is of the Spartan kind. They have been successful far beyond their expectations, and nearly every man there is worth his hundred ounces of gold. Some have more, a few less. Saul has eighty ounces and he keeps it next his heart, sewn in his blue serge shirt. David's wife reproved him once for carrying the weight about.

"It is nearly seven pounds weight, Saul Fielding," she said; "it must weigh you down."

"Weigh me down, David's wife!" he replied, with a sweet look in his eyes. "It is a feather's weight. It bears me up! It is not mine; it belongs to the dearest woman in the world. The little bag that contains it contains my salvation!"

David and Saul were mates; they dug and shared, and he lived with the father, mother, and child. The man he called David, the woman David's wife, the child David's daughter. He said to David's wife one day:

"When I go home and join my dear woman, she and I every night of our lives will call down a blessing for David and David's wife, and David's daughter."

He often said things to David's wife that brought tears to her eyes.

"We shall go home, too," said David's wife, "and we shall see her."

"Please God," returned Saul, and whispered, "Come, happy time!"

How tender his heart grew during this time! How he blessed God for His goodness! What beauty he saw in every evidence of the great Creator! He made the rough men better, and often in the evening they would gather round him while he read to them and talked with them. The Sabbath-day, from the time he came among them, was never passed without prayer. And so they had gone on during the summer and the autumn, digging and getting gold, singing songs to the hills while they dug and delved. The men had built stronger huts for the women and children, in anticipation of the winter, and they all lived happily together. Then the snow began to fall. It came light at first, and dropped softly to the ground round about the huts of the small community, as if it were bringing to them a message of

Love from the clear bright sky. They laughed when they saw it, for it warmed their hearts with visions of the dear old land over the seas. It brought back to them memories of their school-days. "After the snow," they said, "the primroses;" and in their fancy they saw the Old Country's sweet flower. The children played with it, and pelted each other with snow-balls, and the men joined in the sport. The goats scampered up the hills in mad delight, and sent snow-sprays in the air with their hoofs. The women looked on lovingly, and the little gully was filled with pleasant mirth, and the echoes laughed after them. At night they clustered round their fires, and raised up pictures for the future. They talked of their gold, not greedily, but gratefully; they blessed the land which gave them its treasures willingly; and in their dreams they dreamed of dear Old England, and of the dear faces at home—the dear old faces which would smile upon them by-and-by, please God! And while they dreamed, and while their hearts were light, and while within them reigned the peace which came from pleasant thoughts, the soft snow fell and fell. Day after day passed, week after week, and still it fell. After many weeks had thus passed, Saul woke in terror one night. He did not know what had occasioned the fear that was upon him. Was it caused by a dream? He could remember none. He felt as if a spirit's voice had spoken to him. He rose and listened. He heard nothing. Everything around him was wrapped in peace and silence. Softly he dressed himself, so as not to disturb the sleepers, and went out of the tent. The snow was falling fast. How white and pure were the hills! In the far distance they and the sky seemed one. He took a pole, and feeling his way carefully, walked across the near hills, ankle deep, knee deep, breast deep. And yet he had not walked far, not five hundred yards. The terror that was upon him now assumed a tangible shape. He was in a snow prison! Nature held him fast; had built up barriers between him and Jane. Was it destined that he should never get away from these snow-bound hills? Suppose the snow continued to fall for weeks and months! "Jane!" he cried. And the echoes cried, "Jane! Jane!" dying away mournfully. The sound frightened him, and he called no more. Then his reason came back to him. They could keep the snow away from their tents; all they had to do was to shovel it down: all they had to do was to be vigilant. He comforted himself with this thought, and slowly, painfully, retraced his steps to his tent, and crept among his blankets again. As he lay, he heard a moan. How every little sound frightened him! It was but the wind. But the moan grew louder, grew into a shriek, and rushed past the tent, and over the hills, like an angry spirit. And it brought the Snow-Drift with it! But he did not think of that as he lay shivering. He did not know the new danger that threatened him. "God shield you, dear woman!" he murmured, as he fell into a doze. "God bring me to you!"

All night long the wind shrieked and whistled through the tents; the men, tired out, with their exertions, did not wake. But the women did, and lay and trembled. David's wife awoke.

"David!" she whispered; but he did not hear her. "What's the matter, mother?" murmured her daughter.

"Nothing, child, nothing. It's only the wind. Hush! we mustn't wake father. Go to sleep, darling!" The sun rose late the next morning, and a dim blood-veil was in the sky, which made some of them think that it was night still. The miners found the snow round their huts to be three feet deep. They looked anxious at this.

"We can master the snow," they whispered to one another, "but the snow-drift will master us."

Even as they spoke, the wind, which had lulled, began to moan again, and before they had been working an hour shoveling away the snow, the wind-storm, bringing the snow with it from the heights over which it rushed, blinded them, and drove them into their tents for shelter. They could not hold their feet. "Let us hope it'll not last long," they said; and they took advantage of every lull to work against their enemy, not like men, but like heroes.

"What makes you so downcast, Saul?" asked David; he had not begun to lose heart.

Saul looked in silence at David's wife and David's daughter; they were at the far end of the hut.

"You are not frightened, Saul, surely?" said David.

"Not for myself, David," whispered Saul. "But tell me—what kind of love do you bear for your wife and child?" David's look was sufficient answer. "I have a perfect love for a woman also, David. If she were here, as your wife is with you, I could bear it, and so could she. David, we are beset by a terrible danger. Listen to the wind. I am afraid we may never get out of this."

David's lips quivered, but he shook away the fear.

"We mustn't lose heart, Saul, and we must keep this danger from the wife and little one. There's men's work before us, and we must do it—like men!"

"Trust me, David," said Saul; "my heart beats to the pulse of a willing hand;" and said no more.

The wind-storm continued all the day with such violence that it was impossible for the men to work. As the day advanced, the blood-veil in the sky died away, and when the night came the moon's light shone clear and cruel, bright and pitiless.

Worn out with hard toil and anxiety, Saul Fielding lay down that night and tried to sleep. "I must have strength for to-morrow," he thought. The fierce wind had grown faint, and it moaned now among the hills like a weak child. Saul smiled gladly, and accepted it as a good omen. He hugged his gold close, and vowed that he would not risk another season of such danger. "If I do not get an ounce more," he thought, "I will be content. What I have will be sufficient for the home and for Jane. 'Jane, dear Jane!'" Her name always came to him like a prayer, and with "Jane" on his lips, and "Jane" in his thoughts, he fell asleep and dreamed of her.

He dreamed that he and the others had escaped from their snow-prison, and that he was on his way home. Blue waters were beneath him; bright clouds were above him; a fresh breeze was behind him; and the ship dipped into the sea and rose from it, like a light-hearted god. The sailors were singing, and he sang with them as he lent a hand with the ropes. He looked across the sea and saw Jane standing on a far-off shore, with glad face turned toward him. "I am coming, Jane!" he cried, and she smiled, and held out her arms to him. Nearer and nearer he approached to the haven of his hopes; nearer and nearer, until, although they were divided by many miles of water, he could speak to her, and hear her speak. "See!" he cried, and held out his bag of gold. As she raised her eyes with thankfulness to the heavens, David's wife and David's daughter appeared suddenly by his side. "Here are the friends who saved me, Jane," he cried. David is below, asleep, and his wife is here, knowing your story and mine. She insists upon saying that you are her sister; she is a good woman. The shame of the past is gone." As he said these words, a sudden and terrible wind sprang up; and the dark clouds, rushing down from the heavens, shut Jane from his sight. In a moment everything was changed. The ship seemed as if it were being torn to pieces; the waters rose; and the cries of the sailors were indistinguishable amidst the roaring of the wind. "My God!" he heard David's wife cry; and at that moment he awoke, and rising swiftly to his feet, saw a candle alight in the tent, and David's wife standing in her night-dress on his side of the green baize which divided the tent. Her face was white with terror.

"My God!" she cried again; "we are lost!"

The storm that had arisen in his dream was no fancy. It was raging now among the hills furiously.

"Go into your room," said Saul, hurriedly. "I will be dressed in a minute."

In less than that space of time he was up and dressed, and then David tore the green baize aside.

"Saul," he said, "this is terrible!" And stepping to Saul's side, whispered, "If this continues long, our grave is here."

Saul went to the door of the tent and tried to open it; he could not. The wind had brought with it thousands and thousands of tons of snow from the heights, and they were walled up. Saul felt all round the sides of the tent. The snow was man-high. Only the frail drill of which the tent was made kept it from falling in and burying them. In an instant Saul comprehended their dread peril.

"The tree!" he cried, as if an inspiration had fallen upon him. "The tree!"

Just outside the tent, between it and the tent next to it, stood a great pine tree—the only tree among the tents. Many a time had it been suggested to cut down this tree for fire-wood, but David had prevented it. "Wait," he had said, "until we want it; when fire-wood runs short and we can't get it elsewhere, it will be time enough." So the tree had been saved from the axe, and stood there like a giant, defying the storm. Saul piled up the rough seats and the tables which comprised the furniture of the tent, and, climbing to the top of them, cut a great hole in the roof of the tent. It was daylight above, and the snow was falling fast. Saul saw the noble tree standing fast and firm in the midst of the storm. With a desperate leap he caught a branch, and raised himself above the tent. And when he looked upon the awful scene, upon the cruel white snow in which the tents all around him were imbedded, and nearly buried, his heart throbbed despairingly.

But this was no time for despair. It was the time for action. When he had secured his position in the tree, he stooped over the tent.

"David!" he cried. David's voice answered him.

"This is our only chance," he said, loudly; he spoke slowly and distinctly, so that those within the tent might hear him. "Here we may be able to find safety until the storm abates and the snow subsides. Listen to me, and do exactly as I say. Get some provisions together and some water; and the little brandy that is left. Make them up in a bundle. Tie rope and cord round it, and let me have it. Quickly!"

Before he finished speaking, David's wife was busy attending to his instructions.

"Answer me, Saul," cried David. "What do you see of our mates?"

Saul groaned. "Do not ask me, David! Let us thank God that this tree was left standing."

David climbed on to the table in a few minutes, with the bundle of provisions in his hands. He was lifting it for Saul to take hold of, when the pile upon which he was standing gave way, and he fell heavily to the ground.

At this moment a movement in the tent nearest to the tree arrested Saul's attention. One of the men inside had thought also of the tree, and had adopted Saul's expedient of cutting through the roof of the tent. His head now appeared above the rent. He saw Saul, but he was too far away to reach the tree.

"Give me a hand, mate!" he cried. "Give me a hand, for God's sake!"

"One moment," replied Saul, deeply anxious for the fate of David, for he heard the generous-hearted digger groan, and heard David's wife sobbing. "Keep your hold and stand firm for a little while. You are safe there for a time. There is something here in my own tent I must see to at once." Then he called, "David! David! are you hurt?"

The voice of David's wife answered him with sobs and cries. "He can't move, Saul! He can't move! Oh, my poor dear David! He has broken his leg, he says, and his back is hurt. What shall I do? Oh! what shall I do?"

But although she asked this question, she—true wife and woman as she was—was attending to the sufferer, not thinking of herself.

"God pity us!" groaned Saul, and raised his hand to the storm. "Pity us! pity us!" he cried.

But the pitiless snow fell, and the soft flakes danced in the air.

Then Saul cried, "David's wife! The child! the child!"

"Let me be, wife," said David; "I am easier now. Pile up those seats again; make them firm. Don't hurry; I can wait; I am in no pain. Lift our little daughter to Saul, and the provisions afterward."

She obeyed him; she piled the seats one above another; then brought the child to David. He took her in his arms, and kissed her again and again.

"My pet! my darling!" he moaned. "Kiss father, little one!"

And the rough man pressed this link of love to his heart, and kissed her face, her hands, her neck, her lips.

"Now, wife," he said, and resigned their child to her. David's wife stood silent for a few moments with the child in her arms, and murmured a prayer over her, and blessed her, and then, keeping down her awful grief bravely, like a brave woman, climbed to the height, and raised her arms to Saul with the child in them. Only her bare arms could be seen above the tent's roof.

"Come, little one," said Saul, and stooping down, at the risk of his life, clutched the child from the mother's arms, and heard the mother's heart-broken sobs.

"Is she safe, Saul?"

"She is safe, dear woman."

Other heads rose from other tents, and turned despairingly about. But no help for them was near. They were in their grave.

David's wife raised the provisions to Saul, and went down to her husband.

"Wife," said David, "leave me, and see if you can reach Saul. It will be difficult, but you may be able to manage it."

She looked at him tenderly.

"My place is here, David," she said; "I shall stay with you, and trust to God. Our child is safe, in the care of a good man."

He tried to persuade her, but she shook her head sweetly and sadly, and simply said:

"I know my duty."

He could say no more, for the next moment he swooned, his pain was so great. Then his wife knelt by him, and raised his head upon her lap.

Meanwhile the man in the next tent, who had called to Saul to give him a hand, had not been idle. He found a plank, and was raising it to the roof, with the purpose of resting it upon a branch of the tree. As with more than a man's strength he lifted the plank forward, Saul heard a thud beneath him, and looking down, saw that the walls of the tent in which David and his wife were had given way, and that the snow was toppling over. He turned his head; he was powerless to help them. The tears ran down his face and beard, and he waited, awe-struck by the terror of the time. He thought he heard the voice of David's wife cry:

"Good-bye, my child! God preserve you!"

In a choking voice he said, solemnly, to David's little daughter:

"Say 'God bless you, mother and father!'"

The child repeated the words in a whisper, and nestled closer to Saul, and said:

"I'm so cold! Where's mother and father? Why don't they come up?"

Saul, with a shiver, looked down. Nothing of David or of David's wife did he see. The tent was not in sight. The snow had covered it. And still it fell, and still it drifted.

The digger who occupied the next tent had fixed his plank; not a moment was to be lost, his tent was cracking. Creeping along the plank with the nervous strength of desperation, clinging to it like a cat, he reached the tree, and was saved for a time. As he reached it, the plank slipped into the snow. And still it fell, and rose higher and higher. Men signaled to each other from tent to tent, and bade God bless each other, for they felt that, unless the snow-drift and snow-fall should instantly cease, there was no hope for them. But still it fell; fell softly into the holes in the canvas roofs and sides, into the chambers below; crept up to them inch by inch; wrapped yellow gold and mortal flesh in soft shrouds of white, and hid the adventurers from the light of day.

Only three remained. Saul and David's little daughter, in the uppermost branches of the tree. The digger from the nearest tent clinging to a lower branch.

This man was known by the name of Edward Beaver; a silent man at best, and one who could not win confidence readily. His face was covered with hair fast turning gray. Between him and Saul but little intercourse had taken place. Saul had not been attracted by Beaver's manner, although often when he looked at the man a strange impression came upon him that he knew the face. Saul spoke to Beaver once, and asked him where he came from; but Beaver answered him roughly, and Saul spoke to him no more. In this dread time, however, Beaver's tongue was loosened.

"This is awful," he said, looking up at Saul.

Saul looked down upon the white face which was upturned to his, and the same strange impression of its being familiar to him stole upon him like a subtle vapor. An agonizing fear was expressed in Beaver's countenance: he was frightened of death. He was weak, too, having just come out of a low fever, and it needed all his strength to keep his footing on the tree.

"Do you think we shall die here?" he asked.

"I see no hope," replied Saul, pressing David's little daughter to his breast. The child had fallen to sleep. Saul's soul was too much troubled for converse, and the morning passed almost in silence. Saul lowered some food and drink to Beaver. "I have very little brandy," he said; "but you shall share and share." And when Beaver begged for more, he said, "No, not yet; I must husband it. Remember, I have another life here in my arms to care for."

The day advanced, and the storm continued; not a trace of the tents, or of those who lay buried in them.

could be seen. The cruel white snow had made a churchyard of the golden gully.

Night fell, and brought darkness with it; and in the darkness Saul shuddered, with a new and sudden fear, for he felt something creeping up to him. It was Beaver's voice creeping up the tree, like an awful shadow.

"Saul Fielding," it said, "my time has come. The branches are giving way, and I am too weak to hold on."

"God help you, Edward Beaver," said Saul, pityingly.

And David's little daughter murmured in her sleep, "What's that, mother?" Saul hushed her by singing in a soft tender voice a nursery rhyme, and the child smiled in the dark, and her arms tightened round Saul's neck. It was a good thing for them that they were together; the warmth of their bodies was a comfort, and in some measure a safeguard to them.

When Saul's soft singing was over, he heard Beaver sobbing beneath him. "I used to sing that once," the man sobbed, in weak tones, "to my little daughter."

"Where is she now?" asked Saul, thinking of those he loved at home.

"Bessie! Bessie!" cried Beaver, faintly. "Where are you? Oh my God! if I could live my life over again!"

Saul thought of George's Bessie as he asked, "Where do you come from? What part do you belong to?"

It was a long time before he received an answer, and then the words crept up to him, faint and low, through the darkness, as though the speaker's strength were waning fast.

"From London—from Westminster."

"From Westminster?" echoed Saul, and Beaver's face appeared to his imagination.

"I must tell you," gasped the dying man; "I must tell you before I die. You may be saved, and you will take my message home."

"I will, if I am spared," replied Saul, in a voice which had no hope in it.

"I have been a bad son and a bad father. My name is not Beaver—it is Sparrow, and my father, if he is alive, lives in Westminster."

"Old Ben Sparrow, the grocer!" cried Saul, in amazement. "I know him! I saw him a few weeks before last Christmas. You are Bessie Sparrow's father; I thought your face was familiar to me."

"Bad son! bad father!" muttered the man. "Oh my God! the tree is sinking! the branch is giving way! Tell me, quickly, for mercy's sake. My daughter—Bessie—she is alive, then? Tell me of her."

"She was well when I saw her," replied Saul, with a groan, thinking of George and his lost hopes. "She has grown into a beautiful woman."

"Thank God! If you ever see her again, tell her of me—ask my father to forgive me. Take the love of a dying man to them. I have gold about me—it is theirs. Say that I intended to come home and ask forgiveness, but it has been denied me. God has punished me; I am sinking!"

A cry of agony followed, and the wind took it up and carried it over the hills. Then all was hushed, and the erring son and father spoke no more.

Saul offered up a prayer for Bessie's father, and waited sadly for his time to come.

As the night waned, the fierce wind grew softer, and sighed and moaned, repentant of the desolation it had caused. What a long, long night it was! But at length the morning's light appeared, and then Saul, looking down, saw that he and David's little daughter were the only ones left. Stronger grew the light, until day had fairly dawned. As Saul looked over the white expanse, he felt that there was no hope for him, and his mind began to wander. Long-forgotten incidents of his childhood came to him; he saw his father and mother, long since dead; he saw a brother who had died when he himself was a child; he saw Jane as she was when he first met her, as she was on that sad night when she told him of the duty that lay before him; he saw George and the lights on Westminster Bridge. All these visions rose for him out of the snow. And fields and flowers came, and he wandered among them hand in hand with Jane, as they had done on one happy holiday. It did not seem strange to him that there was no color in any of these things; it caused no wonder in his mind that all these loved ones, and the fields and flowers, perfect in form and shape, were colorless, were white and pure as the snow which stretched around him on every side. They were dear memories, all of them—emblems of purity. And in that dread time he grew old; every hour was a year. But in the midst of all the terror of the time he pressed David's little daughter closer and closer to his breast, and committed their souls to God. So that day passed, and the night, and the sun rose in splendor. The white hills blushed, like maidens surprised. With wild eyes and fainting soul, Saul looked around; suddenly a flush of joy spread over his face. Upon a distant mount stood Jane. "Come!" he cried. And as Jane walked over the snow-hills toward him, he waited and waited until she was close to him; then, sinking in her arms, he fell asleep.

PART III.

CHAPTER I.

I HAVE COME TO RETURN YOU SOMETHING.

ON the afternoon of the day on which the *Queen of the South* (with George Naldret in it, as was supposed), sailed out of the Mersey for the southern seas, young Mr. Million, with a small bouquet of choice flowers in his hand, made his appearance in the old grocer's shop. Ben Sparrow, who was sitting behind his counter, jumped up when the young brewer entered, and rubbed his hands and smirked, and comforted himself in every way as if a superior being had honored him with his presence. Young Mr. Million smiled pleasantly, and

without the slightest condescension. The cordiality of his manner was perfect.

"Quite a gentleman," thought Ben; "every inch a gentleman."

Said young Mr. Million, "As I was passing your way, I thought I would drop in and see how you and your granddaughter are."

"It's very kind and thoughtful of you, sir," replied old Ben Sparrow. "Of course, we're a bit upset at George's going. Everything is at sixes and sevens, and will be, I dare say, for a few days. Bessie's inside"—with a jerk of his head in the direction of the parlor—"she's very sad and low, poor dear."

"We mustn't let her mope, Mr. Sparrow," remarked young Mr. Million, striking up a partnership at once with the old grocer.

"No, sir," assented Ben; "we mustn't let her mope; it ain't good for the young—nor for the old, either. But it's natural she should grieve a bit. You see, sir," he said, confidentially, "George is the only sweetheart Bessie ever had. She ain't like some girls, chopping and changing, as if there's no meaning in what they do."

"We must brighten her up, Mr. Sparrow. It wouldn't be a bad thing if you were to take her for a drive in the country one fine day. The fresh air would do her good."

"It would do her good, sir. But I couldn't leave the shop. Business is dreadfully dull, and I can't afford to lose a chance of taking a few shillings—though, with the way things are cut down, there's very little profit got nowadays. Some things go almost for what they cost. Sugar, for instance. I don't believe I get a ha'penny a pound out of it."

Young Mr. Million expressed his sympathy, and said it ought to be looked to. He would speak to his father, who was a "friend of the working-man, you know."

"I don't know how to thank you, sir," said Ben, gratefully. "Indeed, I haven't thanked you yet for the kindness you—"

"I don't want to be thanked," interrupted young Mr. Million, vivaciously. "I hate to be thanked? The fact is, Mr. Sparrow, I am an idle young dog, and it will always give me pleasure to do you any little service in my power. I will go in and say, 'How do you do?' to Miss Sparrow, if you will allow me."

"Allow you, sir!" exclaimed Ben. "You're always welcome here."

"I brought this little bunch of flowers for her. Flowers are scarce now, and the sight of them freshens one up. Although, Mr. Sparrow, your granddaughter is a brighter flower than any in this bunch!"

"That she is, sir; that she is," cried Ben, in delight; adding to himself, under his breath, "Every inch a gentleman! His kindness to George and me is a-mazing—a-mazing!"

The idle young dog, entering the parlor, found Bessie very pale and very unhappy. She was unhappy because of the manner of her parting from George last night; unhappy and utterly miserable because of the poisoned dagger which had been planted in her heart.

"I was passing through Covent Garden," said the idle young dog, in gentle tones, thinking how pretty Bessie looked even in her sorrow, "and seeing these flowers, I thought you would do me the pleasure to accept them."

Bessie thanked him, and took them listlessly from his hand. Tottie, who was playing at "shop" in a corner of the room, weighing sand in paper scales, and disposing of it to imaginary customers as the best four-penny-ha'penny moist (is this ever done in reality, I wonder!), came forward to see and smell the flowers. The idle young dog seized upon Tottie as a pretext for taking a seat, and, lifting up the child on his knee, allowed her to play with his watch-chain, and opened his watch for her, and put it to her ear so that she might hear it tick—a performance of which she would never have tired. His manner towards Bessie was very considerate and gentle, and she had every reason to be grateful to him, for he had been a good friend to her grandfather and her lover. Certainly he was one of the pleasantest gentlemen in the world, and he won Tottie's heart by giving her a shilling—the newest he could find in his pocket. Tottie immediately slipped off his knee, and went to her corner to brighten the coin with sand; after the fashion of old Ben Sparrow, who often polished up a farthing with sand until he could see his face in it, and gave it to Tottie as a golden sovereign. Tottie valued it quite as much as she would have done if it had been the purest gold.

The idle young dog did not stay very long; he was no bungler at this sort of idling, and he knew the value of leaving a good impression behind him. So, after a quarter of an hour's pleasant chat, he shook hands with Bessie, and as he stood smiling at her, wishing her good-day, with her hand in his, the door suddenly opened, and George Naldret appeared.

His face was white and haggard, and there was a wild grief in his eyes. The agony through which he had passed on the previous night seemed to have made him old in a few hours. He stood there silent, looking at Bessie and young Mr. Million, and at their clasped hands. It was but for a moment, for Bessie with a startled cry—a cry that had in it pain and horror at the misery in his face—had taken her hand from Mr. Million's palm; it was but for a moment, but the new expression that overspread George's face like an evil cloud was the expression of a man who had utterly lost all faith and belief in purity and goodness, and had thus lost sight of heaven.

Bessie divined its meaning, and gave a gasp of agony, but did not speak. Not so young Mr. Million.

"Good heavens!" he cried, with a guilty look which he could not hide from George's keen gaze. "George, what has happened?"

George looked at young Mr. Million's outstretched hand, and rejected it disdainfully and with absolute

contempt. Then looked at the flowers on the table—hot-house flowers he knew they were—then Bessie's face, which seemed as if it were carved out of gray-white stone, so fixed did it grow in his gaze—then at the earrings in her ears; and a bitter, bitter smile came to his lips—a smile it was pity to see there.

"These are pretty flowers," he said, raising them from the table; in the intensity of his passion his fingers closed upon the blooming things, and in a moment more he would have crushed them; but he restrained himself in time, and let them drop from his strongly veined hand. "I beg pardon," he said, "they are not mine. Even if they belong to you—which they do, of course—I can have no claim on them now."

He addressed himself to Bessie, but she did not answer him. She had never seen in his face what she saw now, and she knew that it was the doom of her love and his.

"I have come to return you something," he said, and took from his breast a pretty silk purse. It was hung round his neck by a piece of black silk cord, and he did not disengage it readily. It almost seemed as if it wished not to be taken from its resting place.

As he held it in his hand, he knew that his life's happiness was in it, and that he was about to relinquish it. And as he held it, there came to Bessie's mind the words he had spoken only the night before: "See here, heart's treasure," he said, "here's the purse you worked for me, round my neck. It shall never leave me—it rests upon my heart. The pretty little beads! How I love them! I shall kiss every piece of gold I put in it, and shall think I am kissing you, as I do now, dear, dearest, best!"

"Take it," George said now.

She held out her hand mechanically, and as George touched her cold fingers he shivered. Both knew what this giving and taking meant. It meant that all was over between them.

Old Ben Sparrow had come into the room, and had witnessed the scene in quiet amazement; he did not see his way to the remotest understanding of what had passed. But he saw Bessie's suffering, and he moved to her side. When the purse was in her hand he touched her, but she repulsed him gently. Some sense of what was due to herself in the presence of young Mr. Million came to her, and her womanly pride at George's rejection of her in the presence of another man came to her also, and gave her strength for a while.

George's hand was on the door, when young Mr. Million, who was deeply mortified at George's manner toward himself, and who at the same time thought it would be a gallant move to champion Bessie's cause, laid his hand on George's sleeve, and said:

"Stay; you owe me an explanation."

"Hands off!" cried George, in a dangerous tone, and a fierce gleam in his eye. "Hands off, you sneaking dog! I owe you an explanation, do I? I will give it to you when we are alone. Think what kind of an explanation it will be, when I tell you beforehand that you are a false, lying hound! Take care of yourself when next we meet."

Every nerve in George's body quivered with passion and pain.

"You can't frighten me with bluster," said young Mr. Million, who was no coward, "although you may try to frighten ladies with it. As my presence here is likely to cause further pain to a lady whom I esteem—with a respectful look toward Bessie, which caused George to press his nails into his palms—I will take my leave, unless Mr. Sparrow wishes me to stay as a protection to him and his granddaughter."

"No, sir; I thank you," replied Ben Sparrow, sorrowfully. "George Naldret can do my child no more harm than he has done already."

"Then I will go," and he moved toward the door, "first saying, however, that I tried to be this man's friend"—indicating George with a contemptuous motion of his hand, and repeating, "that I tried to be his friend!"

"You lie!" cried George.

"Thinking," continued young Mr. Million, with quiet disdain, "that he was better than others of his class, but I was mistaken. Mr. Sparrow, you exonerate me from all blame in what has taken place?"

"Entirely, sir," said Ben Sparrow, in a sad and troubled voice.

"I wish you and your grandchild good-day, then, and leave my hearty sympathy behind me."

With these words, and with a triumphant look at George, the idle young dog took his departure. Then, after a brief pause, George said:

"I have nothing more to stop for now."

And with a look of misery, was about to depart, when Tottie ran to his side, and plucking him by the coat, looked up into his face.

"Don't go," said Tottie; "stop and play."

"I can't, my dear," said George, raising the child in his arms and kissing her. "I must go. Good-by, little one."

He set the child down; tears were coming to his eyes, but he kept them back.

"One moment, George Naldret," said old Ben Sparrow, trying to be dignified, but breaking down. "George—my dear George—what is the meaning of this?"

"I have no explanation to give, Mr. Sparrow," replied George, sadly.

"George, my dear boy, think for a moment! Are you right in what you are doing? Think of my darling, George; look!"

"Grandfather!"

The word came from Bessie's white lips; but the voice, struggling through her agony, sounded strangely in their ears. The word, however, was sufficient; it carried its meaning in it; it told her grandfather not to beg for her of any man.

"You are right, my darling," he sobbed; "you are right. But neither of you will speak, and I am al-

most distracted. You're not going abroad, then, George?"

"No, Mr. Sparrow; I have no need to go now."

Bessie's strength was giving away. Pride, humiliation, wounded love, suspicion of her lover's faith, were conquering her. She held out her trembling hand to her grandfather. He took it, and cried:

"Georgel! Georgel! you are breaking her heart!"

"She has broken mine!" replied George, and turned, without another word, and left the room, almost blinded by grief and despair.

The moment he was gone, a sigh that was almost a groan broke from Bessie's wounded heart, and she sank into old Ben Sparrow's arms, and fainted there.

CHAPTER II.

WELL, MOTHER, DO YOU WANT ANY WASHING DONE?

WHEN George Naldret was seen in the streets of Westminster, it occasioned, as may be imagined, no little surprise. His neighbors supposed him to be on his way to the other end of the world, and they rather resented his appearance among them, for he had in a certain measure deceived them. He had promised to write to some, to tell them how affairs were over the water; and two or three courageous ones had already made up their minds that if George sent home a good account of things they would sell every stick they had, and make for a land where a brighter future awaited them than they could look forward to here. They would have been satisfied if George had given them an explanation; but this he absolutely refused to do. "I have altered my mind," was all they could get out of him. "I may do that if I like, I suppose, and if it don't hurt you." But some decided that it *did* hurt them; and when they continued to press him for further particulars, he desired them to mind their business; and as this was the most difficult task he could set them, it made matters worse. George was too delicate-minded and too honorable to introduce Bessie's name; and, when the inquisitive ones mentioned it, he turned upon them savagely. It caused quite a commotion in the neighborhood.

On the first day Mrs. Naldret had tried to persuade George to keep in-doors and not show himself. But he said: "No, mother; it will be better for me to show my face at once, and not shirk the thing." And his father backed him up in his resolution.

When he resolved upon this, he went to his bedroom and locked himself in, and, after much sad communing, decided that the first thing it was incumbent on him to do was to go to Bessie and release her from her promise. Thus it was that he had met young Mr. Million in the parlor of the old grocer's shop, where he had spent so many happy hours.

He had decided in his mind what to say. He would be gentle and firm with Bessie. And as he walked to old Ben Sparrow's shop, disregarding the looks of astonishment which his first appearance in the streets occasioned, he rehearsed in his mind the exact words he would speak to her.

But when he arrived there, and saw Mr. Million smilingly holding her hand, and saw the bunch of rare flowers on the table, he received such a shock that his plans were instantly swept away, and he spoke out of the bitterness of his heart.

How the news got about was a mystery, and how it grew into exaggerated and monstrous forms was a greater mystery still.

Who has ever traced to its source the torrent of exciting rumor which, like a rush of waters, flows and swells, unlocking vivid imagination in its course, until reason and fact are lost in the whirl?

All sorts of things were said. George was frightened of the water; he was in debt; he had done something wrong at the shop he had been working for, and was not allowed to leave without clearing it up; these and a hundred other things were said and commented upon.

The peculiarity of this kind of rumor is, that directly a new theory is started, it is accepted as a fact, and is taken to pieces and discussed in all its bearings.

George was a fruitful theme with the neighbors on that Saturday night and on the following day; they served him up hot (like a new and appetizing dish), and so seasoned him, and spiced him, and garnished him, that it would have tingled his blood to have known. But he did not know, and did not even suspect.

To be sure, when Jim Naldret went to the baker's on the Sunday for his baked shoulder of mutton and potatoes, he heard some remarks which did not please him; but he did not say a word to George, and the mother, father, and son spent a sad and quiet evening together, and went to bed earlier than usual.

On the Monday the startling intelligence was bandied from one to another that George Naldret and Bessie Sparrow had broken with each other. Bessie had turned him off, it was said; they had had a dreadful quarrel the night before he was to start for Liverpool.

But it is not necessary here to set down all the reasons that were given for the breaking of the engagement. Some of them were bad, and all were false. But in the course of the day a little rill was started, which grew and grew, and swelled and swelled, until it swallowed up all the other waters. A rod was thrown down, which, becoming instantly quick with life, turned into a serpent, and swallowed all the other serpents. It was said that Bessie had discovered that George had another sweetheart—who she was, where she lived, and how it had been kept secret during all this time, were matters of no importance; but it was first whispered, then spoken aloud and commented on, that this sweetheart should have been something more than a sweetheart to George—she should have been his wife. The reason why she should have been his wife was that George was a father. But where was the child? Rumor decided this instantaneously. The child was no other than our poor little Tottie; and George had basely do-

ceived old Ben Sparrow and Bessie into taking care of the little one by a clever and wicked story that Tottie was an orphan, without a friend in the world. Here was food for the gossipers! How this hot dish was served up, and spiced, and seasoned!

It reached George's ears, and he wrote to Ben Sparrow. He said that he had heard some rumors affecting his character; he did not mention what these rumors were, but he said they were wicked lies—wicked, wicked lies, he repeated in his letter. The rumors he referred to may have reached Mr. Sparrow, and might affect the happiness of a poor innocent child—a child as innocent as he was himself. If so, he was ready to take the little one from Mr. Sparrow's charge. He said no more, concluding here almost abruptly. A reply soon came. Ben Sparrow had heard the rumors, and was shocked at them; he believed what George said in his letter. But the child, said old Ben, was a comfort to them: by "them" he meant himself and Bessie, but he did not mention Bessie's name; it formed the principal part of their happiness now in their little home, and to part with her would cause "them" great grief and pain. His letter, also, was short and to the point. And so our little Tottie remained with old Ben Sparrow and Bessie, and was even more tenderly cared for than before. Somehow or other, these letters were a great consolation to George and Bessie.

But the gossipers and rumor-mongers would not let them alone. They said that George's other sweetheart had declared if he went away she would go with him, and would follow him all over the world. Bessie then was brought in. She had another lover also, a lover she liked better than George. Who should it be but young Mr. Million? He gave her those pretty earrings, of course, and he was seen to go into old Ben's shop with beautiful flowers in his hands, and come away without them. Ben Sparrow encouraged him, too. Oh, it was plain to see what was going on! So both George and Bessie were condemned, and kind gossipers did what they could to keep them from ever coming together again.

George and young Mr. Million met. Mr. Million was alone; George had his father with him. The sight of the idle, well-dressed, smiling young dog made George furious. He left his father, and walked swiftly up to his enemy. A policeman was near. Young Mr. Million beckoned to him, and the limb of the law touched his helmet, and came close. Jim Naldret saw the position of affairs in a moment. "Come along, George," he said, and, linking his arm in that of his son, almost dragged him away. When they reached home, Mrs. Naldret made George promise not to molest young Mr. Million, not even to speak to him. "No good can come of it, my dear boy," she said; "let the scum be! Don't get yourself into trouble for him; he's not worth it. He'll meet with his deserts one day."

Time passed, and the world went on as usual. George got work at his old shop, and worked hard through the ensuing spring and summer. At that time murmurs of discontent began to be heard among the builders and carpenters—not only among them, but among the workers in nearly every other trade as well. Labor was on the strike all over the country, and one trade quickly followed the example of another. Jim himself began to murmur; he wanted to know what he was to do when he got old and couldn't work—for he had found it impossible to put by money for a rainy day.

"Go to the workhouse, I suppose," he said bitterly.

But Mrs. Naldret said: "Let be, Jim, let be; what's the use of looking forward? We should be happy enough as it is if it wasn't for George's misfortune. Poor lad! all the salt seems to have gone out of his life."

In the summer the crisis occurred in the trade, and Jim Naldret came home one day with his hands in his pockets, and said:

"Well, mother, do you want any washing done? I'm on strike."

"Jim! Jim!" cried Mrs. Naldret. "What have you done? Remember Saul Fielding!"

"Saul Fielding wasn't so wrong, after all," said Jim; "I was a bit too hard on him. I can't help myself, mother. I'm obliged to turn out with the others."

It was well for them that during this time George had saved a little money; but although he gave them every penny he had saved, and although they pledged nearly everything of value they had in the house, they were in debt when the strike was at an end.

"It'll be spring before we're clear, mother," said Jim; "we've got to pay this and that, you know."

Mrs. Naldret knew it well enough, and she began to pinch and save; this little family fought the battle of life well.

Old Ben Sparrow, of course, suffered with the rest. Trade grew duller and duller, and he drifted steadily, got from bad to worse, and from worse to worse than that. Autumn came and passed, and winter began to make the poor people shiver; for coals were at a wicked price. Down, down went old Ben Sparrow; sadder and sadder grew his face; and one day, within a fortnight of Christmas—alas! it was just a year from the time when George was nearly going away—Bessie heard a loud and angry voice in the shop. She hurried in, and saw her grandfather trembling behind the counter. The man who had uttered the angry words was quitting the shop. Bessie asked for an explanation.

"It's the landlord, my dear," he sobbed upon her shoulder; "it's the landlord. I've been behindhand with the rent ever so long, and I've promised him and promised him, hoping that trade would improve, until he's quite furious, and swears that he'll put a man in possession to-morrow morning."

"And you can't pay him, grandfather?"

"Bessie, my darling," sobbed old Ben, "there isn't eighteenpence in the house, and I owe other money as well. I'm a ruined man, Bessie, I'm a ruined man! And you, my dear! Oh, dear! oh, dear! what is to become of us?"

And the poor old fellow pleaded to her, and asked her

forgiveness a hundred times, as if he were the cause of their misfortunes.

No need to say how Bessie consoled and tried to cheer him. She drew him into the parlor, and coaxed and fondled him, and rumbled the little hair he had on his head, and so forgot her own sorrow out of sympathy for his that he almost forgot it too. But once during the night, while she was sitting on a stool at his feet, he said, softly and sadly: "Ah, Bess! I wouldn't mind this trouble—I'd laugh at it, really—if—if—"

"If what, dear?"

"If you and George were together, my darling."

She did not reply, but rested her head on his knee, and looked sadly into the scanty fire. She saw no happy pictures in it.

CHAPTER III.

THE MAN IN POSSESSION.

OLD Ben Sparrow had genuine cause for his distress. Ruin not only stared him in the face, but laid hold of him with a hard grip. The landlord was as good (or as bad) as his word. He called the following morning for his rent, and, as it was not forthcoming, he took an inventory, and put a man in possession. He brought this person in with him. A strange-looking man, with a twelvemonth's growth of hair at least on his face, and all of it as white as snow. The faces of Ben Sparrow and Bessie were almost as white as they followed the hard landlord from room to room, like mourners at a funeral. There was first the shop, with very little in it, and that little in bad condition. As the landlord said, How could a man expect to do business, and be able to pay his way honestly, when everything he had to sell was stale and mouldy? And old Ben answered, humbly:

"Yes, yes, sir; you're quite right, sir. I ought to have known better. It's all my fault, Bessie, my darling; all my fault!" And felt as if, instead of an immediate execution coming to him; he ought to be led off to immediate execution.

"What d'ye call these?" asked the landlord, contemptuously. "Figs! Why, they're as shriveled as—as you are."

"Yes, yes, sir; quite right, sir. We are, sir, we are; we ought to be put away! We're worth nothing now—nothing now!"

After the shop came the parlor, with the furniture that old Ben bought for his wedding more than forty years ago; he sobbed as the landlord called out, "One old arm-chair, stuffed and rickety!" and said to Bessie, "Your grandmother's favorite chair, my darling!"

The old fellow could have knelt and kissed the "one old arm-chair, stuffed and rickety," he was so tender about it. Then they went into the kitchen; then up stairs to Ben Sparrow's bedroom, and old Ben cried again as "One old wooden bedstead—wheezy!" went down in the inventory; then into another bedroom, where Bessie and Tottie slept. The man in possession stooped down by the child's bed.

"What are you looking for?" demanded the landlord testily.

"I was thinking the child might be there," replied the man in possession, meekly; "there *is* a child, isn't there?"

"What if there is?" exclaimed the landlord. "Can't sell a child. There's no market for them."

Old Ben explained: "There is a child, Poor little Tottie! But we've sent her out to a neighbor's, thinking you would come."

"And might frighten her, eh?" said the landlord. And shortly afterward took his departure, leaving the man in possession, with strict injunctions not to allow a thing to be taken out of the house.

"You're accountable, mind you," were his last words.

Bessie and her grandfather felt as if the house had been suddenly turned into a prison, and as if this man, with his strange face and snow-white hair, had been appointed their jailer. As he did not appear to notice them, old Ben beckoned to Bessie, and they crept out of the parlor into the shop for all the world as if they had been found guilty of some desperate crime. In the shop they breathed more freely.

"What are we to do with him, Bessie?" asked Ben. "What do they generally do with men in possession? They give 'em tobacco and beer, I've heard. Oh dear! oh dear! I don't mind for myself, my darling; I don't mind for myself. It's time I was put away. But for you, Bessie—oh, my darling child! what have I done to deserve this? What have I done? What have I done?"

"Grandfather," said Bessie, firmly, "you mustn't go on like this. We must have courage. Now I've made up my mind what I'm going to do. I'm going to take care of you, dear grandfather, as you have taken care of me. You know how clever I am with my needle, and I intend to get work; and you shall thread my needles for me, grandfather. We can live on very little!"

Her poor white lips began to tremble here, and she kissed the old man again and again, and cried in his arms, to show how courageous she was.

"I beg your pardon," said a gentle voice behind them. It was the man in possession who spoke. "I beg your pardon," he repeated. "May I beg a word with you in the parlor?"

They dared not for their lives refuse him, and they followed him tremblingly.

"I am aware," he said then, as they stood before him like criminals, "that I am here on an unpleasant duty, and that I must appear very disagreeable in your eyes."

"No, no, sir," remonstrated Ben, feeling that his face and Bessie's were in this man's hands; "don't say that, sir! Quite the contrary, indeed, sir; quite the contrary, eh, Bessie?"

And the arch old hypocrite tried to smile, to show that he was delighted with the man's company.

"But I assure you," continued the man, "that I have no desire to annoy or distress you. I have gone through

hardships myself"—with a motion of his hand toward his white hair—"as you may see."

"What is it you want us to do, sir," asked Ben Sparrow. "I am sure anything you want, such as tobacco or beer—or anything that there is in the cupboard"—

"I want you to feel as if I wasn't in the house. I know, for instance, that this is your sitting-room; I don't want you to run away from it. If you like, I will go and sit in the kitchen."

"No, no, Sir!" implored Ben Sparrow. "Not for worlds. We couldn't allow such a thing, could we, Bessie? This is my grand-daughter, Sir—the dearest child that man ever had!"

Why, here was the man in possession, as old Ben broke down, actually patting him on the shoulder, and looking in his face with such genuine sympathy, that before Ben knew where he was, he had held out his hand as to a friend! What would the next wonder be?

"That's right," said the man in possession; "we may as well be comfortable together, and I shall take it ill of you, if you and your grand-daughter do not use the parlor just as if I wasn't here. If you don't, I shall go and sit in the kitchen."

They could do nothing else after this but look upon the parlor as their own again. Bessie felt very grateful to the man for the sympathy he had shown to her grandfather, and she took out her old work-box, and sat down to mend a pair of Tottie's socks. "The way that child makes holes in her toes and heels is most astonishing," Ben had often remarked.

The man in possession glanced at the little socks, and then at Bessie, so thoughtfully and kindly that she gave him a wistful smile, which he returned, and said, "Thank you, child!" in a very sweet and gentle tone.

When dinner-time came, and before they could ask him to share their humble meal, he went to the street-door and called a boy, who, in obedience to his instructions, brought some cold meat and bread at a neighboring shop. All he asked Bessie to give him was a glass of cold water, and with his bread and meat he made a good meal. To the astonishment of Bessie and old Ben, they found they were growing to like him. After dinner, he seemed to be drowsy, and sat with closed eyes and thoughtful face in the corner of the room he had appropriated to himself, which, it may be remarked, was not the warmest corner. Bessie and old Ben talked in whispers at first, so as not to disturb him, but after a time his regular breathing convinced them that he was sleeping, and Bessie laid down her plans to the old man. When they were turned out of the shop they would take one room, Bessie said; they would be very comfortable, she was sure, if they would only make up their minds to be so, and she would work for all three, for grandfather, Tottie and herself. Indeed, the girl showed herself so much of a true woman in her speech that she was almost beginning to persuade the old man that what had occurred was, after all, no great misfortune.

"How strange that his hair should be white," remarked Ben, looking at the sleeping man. "He does not seem old enough for that. He isn't very attentive to his duties, whatever they may be. Why, Bessie," said the old man, in a whisper that was almost gleeful, "we could actually run away!" But his thoughts assumed their sadder tenor immediately afterward, and he sighed, "Ah, Bessie! What will George think of all this? They've had trouble at home too, Bessie, dear, during the strike. I often wished, during that time, that I could have gone and sat with them, and comforted them; and you wished so too, Bess, I know."

"Yes, dear," answered Bess, in a quiet tone, "I wished so too. But George might have put a wrong construction upon it."

"Bess, darling, tell me"—

"No, no!" cried Bessie, holding up her hands entreatingly, for she anticipated what he was about to say. "Don't ask me, grandfather! It can never, never be! Oh, my dear, I try to forget, but I can't!" She paused, unable to proceed for her tears, but presently said, "I should be so much happier if he thought better of me—although I know we can never be to each other what we were. I was angry and indignant at first, but I am not so now. If he had only answered me about Tottie—dear little Tottie"—The man murmured in his sleep, and they spoke in hushed voices.

"It was wrong of me to doubt him," continued the girl, "very, very wrong! I should have trusted him, as he told me to. He can never think well of me again—never, never! But do you know, dear, that I have loved Tottie more since that time than I did before—poor little motherless thing! I shall never be happy again! Never again! Oh, my poor heart!"

It was Ben's turn now to be the consoler, and he soothed her, and caressed her, and suddenly cried:

"Bessie! young Mr. Million!"

What made Bessie turn white at the name? What made her gasp and bite her lips as the young gentleman entered the room?

"I am grieved to hear of what has happened, Mr. Sparrow," he said, taking off his hat, "and I have come at once to ask if you will allow me to assist you."

"Hush, if you please, sir," returned Ben. "Speak low. That—that man in the corner has been put in by the landlord, and I shouldn't like to wake him. We are in great distress—ruined, I may say, sir"—

"Then let me help you," interrupted young Mr. Million, eagerly. "It will be a pleasure to me. Let me pay this man off. You and Miss Sparrow will confer an obligation upon me—believe me!—if you will allow me to do this."

"I thank you for your offer, sir," replied Ben, with a helpless look around the humble room in which he had spent many happy years, "but"—something in Bessie's face imparted a decision to his voice—"it can't be, sir, it can't be."

"Why?"

"Well, sir, it might get talked about, and that wouldn't do Bessie any good. You see, sir, you are so

far above us that it's impossible we—we can mix, sir. Yes, sir, that's it; it's impossible we can mix. No, sir, it can't be."

Young Mr. Million was silent for a few moments, and tapped with his fingers impatiently on the table.

"For some time," he said, "I have seen that you and Miss Sparrow have rejected my advances, and have been different from what you were. Why, may I ask again?"

"Well, sir," replied old Ben, emboldened by the expression on Bessie's face, "it is best to speak plain. You see, sir, the neighbors will talk; and when they see a gentleman like you always a-visiting poor people like us, they want to know the reason of it. And as we've no reason to give, they make one for themselves. People will talk, you see, sir, and I am afraid that my Bessie's name—my Bessie! the best girl in the world, sir; good enough to be a princess"—

"That she is," put in Mr. Million.

"Well, sir, as I was saying, I am afraid that my Bessie's name has got mixed up with yours by people's tongues in such a way as to cause sorrow to her and to me. I have heard, sir, that she was seen one day—nearly a year ago now—go into your house, and that has been set against her, and flung into her teeth, as a body might say. Well, she did go into your house that once—and only that once, mind!—and took a letter from me which you desired me to send by her last year when I was in trouble. You helped us then, sir, and I am grateful to you, though I can't pay you. And we've got it into our heads—Bessie and me—that that, and the ear-rings you gave her—for they've been talked about too, and that's the reason we sent them back to you—was the cause of a greater sorrow to my poor girl than she has ever experienced in her life."

"Oh!" exclaimed young Mr. Million, with a slight sneer in his tone. "You mean because the affair between Miss Sparrow and that cub, George Naldret, has been broken off."

From Bessie's eyes came such a flash, that if the idle young dog could have flown through the door, and have disappeared there and then instantaneously, he would have gladly availed himself of the opportunity. Old Ben Sparrow's blood, also, was up.

"Be kind enough to go, sir," he said, with more dignity of manner than Bessie had ever seen in him; "and wherever we are, either here or elsewhere, leave us to ourselves and our troubles."

Their voices roused the man in possession; he yawned, and opened his eyes. Young Mr. Million saw here an opportunity to assert himself as the heir of a great brewery, and to indulge in a small piece of malice, at one and the same time.

"I must show the sense of my ingratitude," he said, "by somewhat severe measures, and therefore you will arrange at once for the repayment of the money I have advanced to you. I must remind you that there is such a thing as imprisonment for debt. As for the money which your son embezzled from our firm, I must leave my father to settle that with you. In the mean time"—

"In the meantime," interrupted the man in possession, to the astonishment of all, "I'm the master of this house, being in possession; and as you're not down in the inventory, I must request you to leave."

And without allowing the idle young dog to utter another word, the man in possession, with a wrist of iron, twisted him round and thrust him from the old grocer's shop.

So young Mr. Million, for a fresh supply of wild oats, had to go to another market. And doubtless succeeded in obtaining them: they are plentiful enough.

Ben Sparrow could not but thank the man in possession for his friendly interference.

"Don't mention it," said the man in possession, adding, with an odd smile, "he's not down in the inventory, you know."

The interview had caused old Ben and Bessie great agitation, and left them sadly distressed; but nothing could exceed the consideration of the man in possession. He did not ask them for a word of explanation. When, indeed, the old man stumbingly referred to it, he turned the conversation, and asked for a sheet of paper and an envelope. These being supplied to him, he wrote a note, and when, after putting it in the envelope and addressing it, he looked up, his hitherto sad face wore such a bright expression that Ben whispered to his granddaughter, "Really, Bessie, he is a good fellow; he puts heart into one;" and said, aloud, "Can I post the letter for you, sir?"

"No, thank you," was the reply: "I can send it by a messenger. I mustn't let you out of my sight, you know. The landlord said I was accountable for you."

Old Ben began to feel as if he were in prison again.

It was dark when Tottie was brought home; she ran into the parlor calling for grandfather and Bessie, and jumped into their arms, and kissed them, and pulled old Ben's hair; she seemed to bring light in with her.

"Is that Tottie?" asked the man in possession, in a tremulous tone.

"Yes, sir, yes," replied old Ben. "Go to the gentleman, my dear."

Something like a sob came from the man in possession as he lifted Tottie and kissed her; and when, a little while afterward, the lamp was lighted, and Tottie was seen curled up contentedly in the man's arms eating sweets which he was giving her—with such a sweet tooth as Tottie had, it was no wonder she was easily bought over—old Ben whispered to Bessie:

"Depend upon it, my dear, he has got a little daughter at home, that makes him fond of Tottie."

Everything about this strange man was so gentle that they actually looked upon him as a friend instead of an enemy.

CHAPTER IV.

SOFTLY, SWEETLY PROCEEDS THE HYMN OF HOME.

"It is a story about two friends"—

It is the man in possession who is speaking. Tottie is lying in his arms as contentedly as if she has known him all her life, he has told her the prettiest of stories, and the child has crowed and laughed over them, until she is almost tired with the pleasure and excitement. And now, although it is very nearly eleven o'clock, and time to think of going to bed Bessie and her grandfather find themselves listening to a story which he says he desires to tell them. Of course they dare not refuse to listen.

"It is a story about two friends—mainly about those, although the dearest hopes of others better and purer than they are mixed up in it. The story is a true one. What shall I call these friends, so as to distinguish them? Shall I say George for one—What is the matter, my dear?" For Bessie had looked with a startled glance into the stranger's face. "George is a common name enough, and this man whom I call George is a good man in every sense of the word. Say, shall I call him George?"

"Yes, if you please," replies Bessie, faintly, turning her face from him.

"And the other—I will call him Saul."

"Bessie, my dear!" exclaims old Ben Sparrow. "Do you hear? Saul and George!"

Bessie's hand steals into his, and the stranger continues.

"Say, then, Saul and George. They lived and grew to manhood in just such a neighborhood as this. Saul was the elder of the two by six or seven years; but notwithstanding the difference in their ages, they became firm friends. They talked much together, and read together; for Saul was a great reader, and took delight in studying, and (according to his own thinking) setting wrong things right. I believe that, at one time of his life, he really had a notion that it was his mission to redress the wrongs of his class; at all events, it is certain that he elected himself the champion of his fellow-workmen; and as he had the fatal gift of being able to speak well and fluently, the men listened to him, and accepted his high-flown words as the soundest of logic. George admired his friend, although he did not agree with him; and when he was a man he took an opportunity of vowing eternal friendship to Saul. Such a vow meant something more than words with George; for he was constant and true to the dictates of his heart. Where he professed friendship, there he would show it. Where he professed love, there would he feel it. And it might be depended upon that neither in his friendship nor his love would he ever change. He was no idle talker. Saul, working himself into a state of false enthusiasm respecting his mission, waited but for an opportunity to raise his flag. The opportunity came. A dispute arose between master and men in a certain workshop; Saul plunged himself into the dispute, and by his fatal gift inflamed the men, and fanned the discontent until it spread to other workshops. Neither men nor masters would yield. A strike was the result. In this strike Saul was the principal agitator; he was the speaker, and the man upon whom all depended, in whom all trusted. Hear, in a few words, what occurred then. After making things as bitter as he could; after making the men believe that the masters were their natural enemies; after making a speech one night filled with false conclusions, but which fired the men to a more determined resistance; after doing all this, Saul suddenly deserted his followers and left them in the lurch. He told them that, upon more serious consideration, he had been led to alter his mind, and that he was afraid of the misery a longer fight would bring upon them and their families. The men were justly furious with him; they called him names which he deserved to be called; and the result was that the men returned to work upon the old terms, and that all of them—masters and men—turned their backs upon the man who had betrayed them. Only one among them remained his friend. That one was George. From that day Saul began to sink; he could get no work; and he dragged down with him a woman who loved him, who had trusted in him, and whom he had robbed of her good name. Stay, my dear," said the man in possession, placing a restraining hand upon Bessie's sleeve; the girl had risen, uncertain whether to go or stay. "You must hear what I have to say; I will endeavor to be brief. This woman had a child, a daughter, born away from the neighborhood in which Saul was known. Her love was great; her grief was greater. Saul showed himself during this time to be not only a traitor, but a coward. He took to drink. What, then, did this good woman—ah, my dear, how good she was—only Saul knows!—what did this good woman resolve to do for her child's sake? She resolved that she would not allow her child to grow up and be pointed out as the child of shame; that she would endeavor to find some place where it could be cared for, and where, if happier times did not come to her, the child might grow up in the belief that her parents were dead. Shame should not cast its indelible shadow over her darling's life. Saul, in his better mood, agreed with her. 'I have no friends,' said this woman to Saul; 'have you? Have you a friend who, out of his compassion for the child and friendship for you, would take my darling child, and care for it as his own?' Saul had no friend but one. George! He went to George and told his trouble, and this dear noble friend, this man I arranged with a neighbor to take the child, and bring her up. He promised sacredly to keep Saul's secret, and only to tell one person the story of the poor forsaken one. 'I may marry one day, Saul,' he said, 'and then I must tell it to my wife.' In this way the mother obtained her desire; in this way came about her love's sacrifice!"

Tick—tick—tick—comes from the old-fashioned clock in the corner. Bessie has sunk into her chair, and her head is bowed upon the table. She hears the clear tick,

and thinks of a year ago, when, standing at the door with her lover, it sounded so painfully in her ears. What pain, what pleasure, has this strange man brought to her! For she knows that the story he is telling is true, and that Saul's friend, George, is her George, whom she has loved truly and faithfully during all this sad year. What pain! What pleasure! What pain to feel that George is parted from her forever! What pleasure to know that he is without a stain, that he is even more noble than her love had painted him! She raises her head; her eyes are almost blinded by her tears; she stretches forth her arms for Tottie.

"Let me nurse her!" she sobs.

"No, my dear," says the man in possession; but he places Tottie's lips to hers, and then stoops and kisses Bessie's tears which have fallen on the little one's face. "There is more to tell. Shall I go on?"

"Yes."

"A happy time comes to George. He falls in love with a tender-hearted, pure souled girl."

Bessie kneels at his feet, and looks in bewilderment at the man's strange face, at his snow-white hair, and in gratitude raises his hand to her lips.

"There, there, child!" he says; "sit down: you interrupt my story. They are engaged to be married, and George is anxious to make a home for his bird. But trade is slack, and he can save no money. Then comes a false man, whom we will call Judas, into the story, who, under the pretense of friendship for George, gives him a passage ticket to the colonies, where George can more quickly save money to buy the home to which he yearns to bring his bird. But on the very night, within three hours of the time when George is to look his last upon the little house in which he was born, he learns from Saul that this pretended friend has played him false, has told him lies, and has given him the ticket only for the purpose of getting him out of the country, so that Judas can pay court to the girl who reigns in George's heart. Other doubts and misunderstandings unfortunately accumulate in these critical moments; George learns that the girl was seen to go into the house where Judas's father lives; learns that Judas has given her a pair of earrings; learns that Judas was seen by George's mother to place a letter in the girl's hands."

"It was for grandfather!" cries Bessie. "It contained money for grandfather to help him out of his trouble!"

"Hush, my dear! What can you know of this story of mine? When George learns all this he is in an agony of despair. He takes the ticket from his pocket, and is about to destroy it, when Saul falls on his knees at his friend's feet, and begs, entreats, in his agony, for the ticket, so that he may go instead of George. For Saul's dear woman has left him; has charged him, by his love for her and for their child, to make an effort to hit them from shame; and he has no way—no way but this which is suddenly opened to him. George gives his friend the ticket, and the next day Saul bids good-by to the land which holds all that is dear to his heart."

The man in possession pauses here, and old Ben Sparrow gazes earnestly at him. When he resumes, his voice grows more solemn.

"Saul reaches his destination, and after much wandering finds a shelter in the mountains with a little colony of gold-diggers. He makes a friend there—David. Another—David's wife. God rest their souls! Another—David's little daughter. Saul finds gold, and thanks God for his goodness. He will come home and make atonement. But the snow season sets in, and he and his companions are imprisoned by mountains of snow whose shallowest depth is sufficient for a man's grave if he is buried upstanding. An awful night comes, when the snow-drift walks up their tents. In the morning the tents are hemmed in; the diggers can not open their doors. Near to the tent in which Saul and David and David's wife and David's little daughter live, is a tree. Saul climbs to the roof of the tent, breaks through it, climbs on the tree, and calls to his friends to follow him. David tries, and fails; he falls back into the tent, and hurts himself to death. Saul, in an agony, calls out for David's little daughter, and the mother succeeds in raising the child through the roof of the tent; Saul clutches the little girl and takes her to his heart. All this time the storm is raging; the snow rises higher and higher. David commands his wife to save herself; she refuses, and stays to nurse him, and slowly, slowly, my dears, the snow falls, the walls of the tent give way; and David's wife meets a noble death, and both find their grave."

Awe-struck they listen to this strange man's story. A look of pity steals into his face—and then he murmurs to himself, "No; why should I bring sadness upon them this night? And why, now?"

The tree to which Saul clings for dear life with David's little daughter one other man manages to reach. His story you shall hear to-morrow, sufficient here to say that it is a strange one, and it comes strangely to Saul's ears. He bequeaths his gold to Saul for a good purpose. But this man is weak; his strength fails him in the night; and when the next morning's sun rises Saul and David's little daughter are the only ones left. Can you picture Saul to yourself clinging to the tree, holding in his arms the life of a dear little one? Can you realize the agony of the time? Can you believe that his grief and tribulation are so great during the two terrible days that follow that his hair turns snow-white?"

"But he is saved!" cries Bessie and her grandfather at once.

"He is saved."

"And David's little daughter?"

"Is saved also, God be thanked!"

They draw a long breath.

"But little remains to be told. Saul comes home, bringing David's little daughter with him—bringing gold with him. He seeks his dear woman. He marries her. He hears that the old man and the dear girl who have protected and reared his child are in trouble—that

an execution is to be put into the old man's shop for rent!"

"And he becomes a man in possession!" cries old Ben, starting up in indescribable excitement. "Oh, dear! oh, dear! He becomes a man in possession!"

The tolling of a bell is heard.

"As you say. Is not the Westminster clock beginning to chime the hour? Listen for one minute more. When Judas comes in this afternoon, do you think the man in possession is asleep? No; he is awake, and hears every word that passes, and such a joy comes into his heart as he cannot describe; for he thinks of George—that dear friend, that noble friend, that man! What does the man in possession do when Judas has gone? He writes a letter, doesn't he? Hark! the last hour is tolling! Twelve!"

The door opens, and Bessie, with a wild cry, moves but a step, and presses her hand to her heart. George stands before her, pale with the excitement of the moment, but hopeful, and with love in his eyes.

"George, my dear boy," cries old Ben, grasping the young man's hands.

"Can you forgive me, Bessie?" asks George.

A grateful sob escapes from the girl's overcharged heart, and the lovers are linked in close embrace.

As if this happy union had conjured them up, there enter on the instant Jim Naldret and Mrs. Naldret, she nursing David's little daughter. And behind them, with a wistful look, with hands that are convulsed with excess of tenderness, with eyes and face, and heart filled with yearning love, stands the mother hungering for her child. Tenderly and solemnly Saul places Tottie in Jane's arms. The mother steals softly into the shop with her child, and Saul follows, and kneels before her. Presently she takes him also to her breast.

"Dear wife," he murmurs; and a prayer of infinite thankfulness for the mercy and the goodness of God comes to his mind.

Half an hour afterward he enters the room with Jane and their child.

"Bessie," he says, "this is my wife, Jane."

And as Bessie kisses her and caresses her, the sorrow of the past melts into gratitude for the present.

They sit and talk.

"George and I are going into business together," says Saul. "We shall start a little shop of our own."

"And stop at home," remarks Mrs. Naldret, "and be contented."

"Yes," replies George, on "bread-and-cheese and kisses. I shall be able to buy my pots and pans now." Somehow or other George has come into possession of the little silk purse again.

"Bessie!" exclaims Mrs. Naldret. "My dream that I told you last year 'I'll come true!'"

The maid blushes. She is dreaming happily now. So are they all, indeed. Old Ben hopes that they will not wake up presently.

Silence falls upon them. And in the midst of the silence, the sounds of music steal to their ears, and they gaze at each other with earnest, grateful eyes. It is the waits playing "Home, sweet Home."

"Do you remember, George?" says Bessie, with a tender clasp.

Softly, sweetly, proceeds the hymn of Home. The air is filled with harmony and prayer.

[THE END.]

The Lawyer's Secret.

CHAPTER I.

IN A LAWYER'S OFFICE.

"It is the most provoking clause that was ever invented to annul the advantages of a testament," said the lady.

"It is a condition which must be fulfilled, or you lose the fortune," replied the gentleman.

Whereupon the gentleman began to drum a martial air with the slender tips of his white fingers upon the morocco-covered office table, while the lady beat time with the point of her narrow foot.

For the gentleman was out of temper, and the lady was out of temper also. I am sorry to have to say it of her, for she was very young and very handsome, and though the lady's light in her dark eyes, as she had a certain vixenish beauty, it was a species of beauty rather alarming to a man of a nervous temperament.

She was very handsome. Her hair was of the darkest brown, and clustered about her head in rich, waving masses, that fell into extemporary curls under her elegant Parisian bonnet. Her eyes, as I have said, were gray—those large, gray eyes, fringed with long, black lashes, which are more dangerous than all other eyes ever invented for the perdition of honest men. They looked like deep pools of shining water, bordered by dark and shadowy rushes; they looked like stray stars in an inky sky; but they were so beautiful that, like the signal lamp which announces the advent of an express upon the heels of a luggage train, they seemed to say "Danger!" Her nose was aquiline; her mouth small, clearly cut, and very determined in expression; her complexion brunette, and rather pale. For the rest, she was tall, her head set with a haughty grace upon her sloping shoulders, her hands and feet small, and delicately shaped.

The gentleman was ten or fifteen years her senior. He, too, was handsome, eminently handsome; but there was a languid indifference about his manner, which communicated itself even to his face, and seemed to overshadow the very beauty of that face, with a dark

veil of weary listlessness, that extinguished the light of his eyes and blotted out the smile upon his lips.

That any one so gifted by nature as he seemed gifted, could be as weary of life as he appeared, was, in itself, so much a mystery, that one learned to look at him as a man under whose quiet outward bearing lay some deep and stormy secret, unrevealed to common eyes.

He was dark and pale, with massively cut features, thoughtful brown eyes, which rarely looked up from under the heavy eyelids that shrouded them. The mouth was spiritual in expression, the lips thin; but the face was wanting in one quality, lacking which, it lacked the power which is the highest form of manly beauty; and that quality was determination.

He sat drumming with his white, taper fingers upon the table, and looking down, with a gloomy shade upon his handsome forehead.

The scene was a lawyer's office in Gray's Inn. There was a third person present, an elderly lady, rather a faded beauty in appearance, and very much dressed. She took no part in the conversation, but sat in an easy chair by the blazing fire, turning over the crisp sheets of the *Times* newspaper, which, every time she moved them, emitted a sharp, crackling sound, unpleasant to the nervous temperaments of the younger lady and the gentleman.

The gentleman was a solicitor, Horace Margrave, the guardian of the young lady, and executor of her uncle's will. Her name was Ellinor Arden; she was sole heiress and residuary legatee to her uncle, John Arden, of the park and village of Arden, in Northamptonshire; and she had this very day come of age. Mr. Margrave had been the trusted and valued friend of her father, dead ten years before, and of her uncle, only lately dead; and Ellinor Arden had been brought up to think, that if there were truth, honesty, or friendship upon earth, those three attributes were centered in the person of Horace Margrave, solicitor, of Gray's Inn.

He is to-day endeavoring to explain and to reconcile her to the conditions of her uncle's will, which are rather peculiar.

"In the first place, my dear Ellinor," he says, still drumming on the table, still looking at his desk, and not at her, "you had no particular right to expect to be your uncle, John Arden, of Arden's, heiress."

"I was his nearest relation," she said.

"Granted; but that was no reason why you should be dear to him. Your father and he, after the amiable fashion of brotherly love in this very Christian country, were almost strangers to each other for the best part of their lives. You, your uncle never saw, for your father lived on his wife's small property in the North of Scotland, and you were brought up in that remote region until you were sent to Paris, to be there educated under the surveillance of your aunt, and you therefore never made the acquaintance of John Arden, of Arden, your father's only brother."

"My father had such a horror of being misinterpreted; had he sought to make his daughter known to his rich brother, it might have been thought—"

"That he wanted to get that rich brother's money. It might have been thought? My dear girl, it would have been thought! Your father acted with the pride of the Northamptonshire Ardens; he acted like a high-minded English gentleman; and he acted, in the eyes of the world, like a fool. You never, then, expected to inherit your uncle's money?"

"Never! Nor did ever wish it. My mother's little fortune would have been enough for me."

"I wish to heaven you had never had a penny beyond it!"

As Horace Margrave said these few words, the listless shadows on his face swept away for a moment, and revealed a settled gloom, painful to look upon.

He so rarely spoke on any subject whatever in a tone of real earnestness that Ellinor Arden, startled by the change in his manner, looked up at him suddenly and searchingly. But the veil of weariness had fallen over his face once more, and he continued, with his old indifference:

"To the surprise of everyone, your uncle bequeathed to you, and to you alone, his entire fortune. Stranger as you were to him, this was an act, not of love to you, but of duty to his dead brother. But the person he really loved was unconnected with him by the ties of kindred, and he no doubt considered that it would be an injustice to disinherit his only niece in favor of a stranger. This stranger, this protégé of your uncle's, is the son of a lady who once was beloved by him, but who loved another, poor and humble than Squire Arden, of Arden, and who told him so, candidly, but tenderly, as a good woman should tell a man of that which she knows may shiver the whole fabric of his life. She married this poorer suitor, George Dalton, a young surgeon in a small country town. She married him, and three years after her marriage she died, leaving an only child, a boy. This boy, on the death of his father, which happened when he was only four years old, was adopted by your uncle. He never married, but devoted himself to the education of the son of the woman who had rejected him. He did not, however, bring up the boy to look upon himself as his heir; but he educated him as a man ought to be educated who has his own path to make in life. He had him called to the bar, and Henry Dalton had pleaded his first cause a year before your uncle's death. He did not leave him one farthing."

"But—"

"But he left his entire fortune to you, on condition that you should marry Henry Dalton within a year of your majority."

"And if I marry anyone else, or refuse to marry this apothecary's son, I lose the fortune?"

"Every farthing of it."

A beautiful light flashed from her eyes, as she rose hurriedly from her chair, and, crossing the room, laid her hand lightly upon Horace Margrave's shoulder.

"So be it," she said, with a smile. "I will forfeit the fortune. I have a hundred a year from my mother's

estate—enough for any woman. I will forfeit the fortune, and"—she paused for a moment, "and marry the man I love."

We have said that Horace Margrave had a pale complexion; but as Ellinor Arden said these words, his face changed from its ordinary dark pallor to a deadly ashen hue, and his head sank forward upon his chest, while his strongly-marked black eyebrows contracted painfully over his half-closed eyes.

She stood a little behind his chair, with her small gloved hand resting lightly on his shoulder, so she did not see the change in his face. She waited a minute or two, to hear what he would say to her determination; and, on his not speaking, she moved away from him impatiently, and resumed her seat on the other side of the large office table.

Nothing could have been more complete in its indifference than Mr. Margrave's manner, as he looked lazily up at her, and said:

"My poor romantic child! Throw away a fortune of three thousand a year, to say nothing of Arden Hall, and the broad lands thereto appertaining, and marry the man you love?" My sweet, poetical Ellinor, may I venture to ask who is this fortunate man whom you love?"

It seemed a very simple and straightforward question, emanating, as it did, from a man of business, many years her senior, her dead father's old friend, and her own guardian and trustee; but, for all that, Ellinor Arden appeared utterly unable to endure it. A dark flush spread itself over her handsome face; her eyelids fell over her flashing eyes; and her lips quivered with an agitation she was powerless to repress. She was silent for some minutes, during which Horace Margrave played carelessly with a penknife, opening and shutting it absently, and not once looking at his beautiful ward. The elderly lady by the fireplace turned the crackling sheets of the *Times* more than once during the short silence, which seemed so long.

Horace Margrave was the first to speak.

"My dear Ellinor, as your guardian, till this very day possessed of full power to control your actions—after to-day, I trust, still possessed of the privilege, though, perhaps, not the right to advise them—I have, I hope, some claim on your confidence. Tell me, then, candidly, as you may tell a middle-aged old lawyer, like myself, who is it you love? Who is it you would rather marry than Henry Dalton, the adopted son of your uncle?"

For once he looked at her as he spoke, she looking full at him; so it was that their eyes met; a long, earnest, reproachful, sad look was in hers; in his a darkness of gloomy sorrow, beyond all power of description.

His eyes were the first to fall; he went on playing with the handle of the pen-knife, and said:

"You are so long in giving me a candid and straightforward answer, my dear girl, that I begin to think this hero is of rather a mythic order, and that your heart is, after all, perhaps, free. Tell me, Ellinor, is it not so? You have met so few people—have passed so much of your life in the utter seclusion of a Parisian convent—and when away from the convent you have been so protected by the Argus-like guardianship of your respected aunt—that I really cannot see how you can have lost that dear, generous heart of yours. I suspect that you are only trying to mystify me. Once for all, then, my ward, is there any one whom you love?"

He looked at her as he asked this decisive question, with a shrinking upward glance under his dark eyelashes—something like the glance of a man who looks up, expecting a blow, and knows that he must shiver and close his eyes when that blow falls.

The crimson flush passed away from her face, and left her deadly pale, as she said, with a firm voice:

"No!"

"No one?"

"No one."

Horace Margrave sighed a sigh of deep relief, and proceeded in his former tone—entirely the tone of a man of business.

"Very well, then, my dear Ellinor, seeing that you have formed no prior attachment, that it is your uncle's earnest request, nay, solemn prayer, that this marriage should take place; seeing also, that Henry Dalton is a very good young man"—

"I hate good young men!" she said, impatiently.

"Dreadfully perfect beings, with light hair and fresh-colored cheeks; dressed in pepper-and-salt suits, and double-soled boots! I detest them!"

"My dear Ellinor! My dear Ellinor! Life is neither a stage play or a three-volume novel; and, rely upon it, the happiness of a wife depends very little on the color of her husband's hair, or the cut of his coat. If he neglects you, will you be happier, lonelier and deserted at home, in remembering the dark waving curls clustering round his head, at that very moment, perhaps, drooping over the green cloth of a hazard table in St. James street? If he wrings your heart with the rack-ing tortures of jealousy, will it console you to recall the flashing glances of his hazel eyes, whose gaze no longer meets your own? No, no, Ellinor! dispossess yourself of the school girl's notion of Byronic heroes, with turn-down collars, and deficient moral region. Marry Henry Dalton; he is so good, honored, and sensible, that you must ultimately learn to esteem him. Out of that esteem will grow, by-and-by, love; and, believe me, paradoxical as it may sound, you will love him better from not loving him too much."

"As you will, my dear guardian," she said. "Henry Dalton, by all means, then, and the fortune. I should be very sorry not to follow your excellent, sensible, and judicious advice."

She tries to say this with his own indifference; but she says it with a sneering emphasis, and, in spite of herself, she betrays considerable agitation.

"If we are to dine at six," interposed the faded lady by the fireplace, who had been looking over the top of the newspaper every three minutes, hopelessly awaiting a break in the conversation.

"We must go home directly," said Ellinor. "You are right, my dear Mrs. Morrison; I am most inattentive to you. Pray forgive me; remember the happiness of a life," she looked not at Mrs. Morrison, but at Mr. Margrave, who had risen and stood lounging—tall, graceful, and indifferent—against the mantelpiece, "the happiness of a life, perhaps, trembled on the interview of to-day. I have made my decision, at the advice of my kind guardian. A decision must, no doubt, result in the happiness of every one concerned. I am quite at your service, Mrs. Morrison."

Horace Margrave laid his hand on the bell by his side.

"Your carriage will be at the entrance to the Inn in three minutes, Ellinor. I will see you to it. Believe me, you have acted wisely; how wisely, you may never know."

He himself conducted them down the broad paneled staircase, and putting on his hat, led his ward through the quiet Inn gardens to her carriage. She was grave and silent, and he did not speak to her till she was seated with her elderly companion and chaperone in her roomy clarence, when he leaned his hand on the carriage door, and said:

"I shall bring Henry Dalton to Hertford Street this evening, to introduce him to his future wife."

"Pray do so," she said. "Adieu!"

"Only till eight o'clock."

He lifted his hat, and stood watching the carriage as it drove away, then walking slowly back to his chambers, flung himself into a luxurious easy chair, took a segar from a costly little Venetian casket, standing on a tiny table at his side, lit it, wheeled his chair close to the fire, stretched his feet out against the polished steel of the low grate, and prepared for a lazy half hour before dinner.

As he lit the segar, he looked gloomily into the blaze at his feet, and said—

"Horace Lionel Welmorden Margrave, if you had only been an honest man!"

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH A SECRET IS REVEALED, BUT NOT TO THE READER.

THE hands of the ormolu clock, in the little drawing-room in Hertford Street, occupied by Ellinor Arden and her companion, protectress, and dependent, Mrs. Morrison, pointed to a quarter past eight, as Horace Margrave's quiet brougham rolled up to her door.

Horace Margrave's professional position was no inconsiderable one. His practice was large and eminently respectable; lying principally amongst railway companies, and involving transactions of a very extensive kind. He was a man of excellent family, a perfect gentleman, elegant, clever, and accomplished; too good for a lawyer, as everybody said, but a very good lawyer for all that, as his clients constantly repeated. At five-and-thirty he was still unmarried; why, no one could guess; as many a great heiress, and many a pretty woman, would have been only too proud to say "Yes" to a matrimonial proposition from Horace Margrave, of Gray's Inn, and the Fir Grove, Stanlydale, Berkshire. But the handsome lawyer evidently preferred his free bachelor life: for if his heart had been very susceptible to womanly graces, he would most inevitably have lost it in the society of his lovely ward, Ellinor Arden.

Ellinor had been only a few weeks resident in London; she had left the guardianship of her aunt in Paris, to launch herself upon the whirlpool of English society, sheltered only by the ample wing of an elderly lady, duly selected and chartered by her aunt and Mr. Margrave. The world was new to her, and she came from the narrow circle of the convent in which she had been educated, and the quiet coterie of the Faubourg Saint Germain, in which her aunt delighted, to take her position at once in London, as the sole heiress of Mr. Arden, of Arden.

It was then to Horace Margrave—to Horace Margrave, whom she remembered in her happy youth among the Scottish mountains, a young man on a shooting expedition, visiting at her father's house—Horace Margrave, who had visited her aunt, from time to time, in Paris, and who had exhibited towards her all the tender friendship and respectful devotion of an elder brother—to him, and to him alone, did she look for counsel and guidance; and she submitted as entirely to his influence as if he had indeed been that guardian and father whom he by law represented.

Her cheek flushed as the carriage wheels stopped below the window.

"Now, Mrs. Morrison," she said, with a sneer; "now for my incomparable *future*. Now for the light hair and the thick boots."

"It will be very impertinent of him if he comes in thick boots," replied her matter-of-fact protectress. "Mr. Margrave says he is such an excellent young person."

"Exactly, my dear Mrs. Morrison—a young person. He is described in one word, a 'person.'"

"Oh, my dream! my dream!" she murmured, under her breath.

Remember, she had but this day passed wisdom's Rubicon, and she was new to the hither bank. She was still very romantic, and, perhaps, very foolish.

The servant announced "Mr. Margrave and Mr. Dalton."

In spite of herself, Ellinor Arden looked up with some curiosity to see this young man, for whom she entertained so profound a contempt and so unmerited an aversion. He was about three years her senior; of average height, neither tall or short. His hair was, as she had prophesied, light; but it was by no means an ugly color, and it clustered, in short curls, round a broad, low, but massive forehead. His features were sufficiently regular; his eyes, dark blue. The general expression of his face was grave, and it was only on rare occasions that a quiet smile played round his

firmly moulded lips. Standing side by side with Horace Margrave, he appeared anything but a handsome man; but, to the physiognomist, his face was superior in the very qualities in which the dark beauty of the lawyer was deficient; force, determination, self-reliance, perseverance; all those attributes, in short, which go to make a great man.

"Mr. Dalton has been anxiously awaiting the hour that should bring him to your side, Miss Arden," said Horace Margrave. "He has been for a long time acquainted with those articles in your uncle's will which you only learned to-day."

"I am sorry Miss Arden should have ever learned them, if they have given her pain," said the young man quietly.

Ellinor looked up in his face, and saw that the blue eyes, looking down into hers, had a peculiar earnestness all their own.

"He is not so bad, after all," she thought. "I have been foolish in ridiculing him; but I can never love him."

"Miss Arden," he continued, dropping into a chair by the sofa on which she was seated, while Horace Margrave leaned against the opposite side of the fireplace—"Miss Arden, we meet under such peculiar circumstances, that it is best for the happiness of both that we should at once understand each other. Your late uncle was the dearest friend I ever had; no father could have been dearer to the most affectionate of sons than he was to me. Any wish, then, of his must be forever sacred. But I have been brought up to rely upon myself alone, and I am proud in saying I have no better wish than to make my own career, unaided by interest or fortune. The loss, then, of this money will be no loss to me. If it be your will to refuse my hand, and to retain the fortune, to which you alone have a claim, do so. You shall never be disturbed in the possession of that to which you of all others have the best right. Mr. Margrave, your solicitor, and executor to your uncle's will, shall to-morrow execute a deed, abnegating, on my part, all claim to this fortune; and I will, at one word from you, bid you adieu this night; before," he added slowly, with an earnest glance at her beautiful face, "before my heart is too far involved to allow of my being even just."

"Mr. Dalton," said Horace Margrave, lazily watching the two from under the shadows of his eye-lashes, "you bring Roman virtue into May Fair. You will purify the atmosphere."

"Shall I go or stay, Miss Arden?" asked the young woman.

"Stay, Mr. Dalton!" She rose as she spoke, and laid her hand, as if for support, upon the back of a chair that was standing near her. "Stay, Mr. Dalton. If your happiness can be made by the union, which was my late uncle's wish, let it be so. I cannot hold this fortune which is not mine; but I may share it. I will confess to you, and I know your generous nature will esteem me better for the confession, that I have dared to cherish a dream in which the image of another had a part. I have been foolish, mistaken, absurd; as school-girls often are. The dream is broken. If you can accept my uncle's fortune and my own esteem; one is yours by right, the other has been nobly won by your conduct of this evening."

She held out her hand to him, he pressed it gently, and, raising it to his lips, led her back to the sofa, and reseated himself in the chair, close beside her.

Horace Margrave closed his eyes, as if the long expected blow had fallen.

The rest of the evening passed slowly. Mr. Margrave talked, and talked brilliantly; but he had a very dull audience. Ellinor was *distracted*, Henry Dalton thoughtful, and Mrs. Morrison eminently stupid. The lawyer repressed two or three yawns, which he concealed behind an embrokked fire-screen, and when the clock, on which an ormolu Pan reclined amidst a forest of bronze rushes, announced half-past ten, he rose to depart, and Ellinor was left to ponder over the solemn engagement into which she had entered on the impulse of the moment.

"I had better take a cab to the Temple," said young Dalton, as they left the house. "I'll wish you good-night, Mr. Margrave."

"No, Mr. Dalton, I have something to say to you that must be said, and which, I think, I'd rather say by night than in the day. If you are not afraid of late hours, come home with me to my chambers, and smoke a cigar. Before you see Ellinor Arden again, I must have an hour's conversation with you. Shall it be to-night? I ask it as a favor; let it be to-night."

Henry Dalton looked considerably astonished by the earnestness of the lawyer's words, but he merely bowed, and said:

"With great pleasure. I am entirely at your service; if I returned to my chambers, I should read for two or three hours, so do not be afraid of keeping me up."

Henry Dalton and Horace Margrave sat talking for nearly three hours in the chambers of the latter; but no cigars were smoked by either of them, and though a bottle of Madeira stood on the table, it was entirely untouched. It was to be observed, however, that a cellar had been opened, and a decanter of brandy taken out; the stopper lay beside it, and one glass, which had been drained to the dregs.

The clocks were striking two as Horace Margrave himself opened the outer door for his late visitor. On the threshold he paused, and laying his hand, with a strong grasp, on Dalton's arm, he said, in a whisper:

"I am safe, then! Your oath is sacred!"

Henry Dalton turned and looked him full in the face—looked full at the pale face and downcast eyes, completely shrouded by the white lids and shadowy black eyelashes.

"The Daltons, of Lincolnshire, are not an old family. Mr. Margrave, or a rich family; but they keep their word. Good-night."

He did not hold out his hand at parting; but merely lifted his hat, and bowed gravely.

Horace Margrave sighed as he locked the doors, and returned to his warm study.

"At least," he said, "I am safe! But then I might have been happy. Have I been wise to-night? have I been wise, I wonder?" he muttered, as his eyes wandered to a space over the mantel-piece, on which were arranged a couple of pairs of magnificently mounted pistols, and a small dagger, in a chased silver scabbard. "Perhaps, after all, it was scarcely worth the trouble of this explanation; perhaps, after all, *Le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle!*"

CHAPTER III.

AFTER THE HONEYMOON.

THREE months had elapsed since the midnight interview in Horace Margrave's chambers—three months, and the Opera House was opened for the season, and three new tenors, and two sopranos, and a basso-bari-tone had appeared under the classic proscenium of Her Majesty's Theatre; the novel of the season had been circulated by Mudie; Rotten Row was gay with amazonian equestrians and *blase* lifeguardsmen, with long amber whiskers, as yet untrampled by red tape; moss roses were selling on the dusty pavements of the West End streets; and Covent Garden was all a-bloom with artistically arranged bouquets of rich tropical flowers, gorgeous in color and delicious in perfume; London, in short, was in the full flood-tide of the season, when Mr. and Mrs. Henry Dalton returned from their honeymoon visit to the Cumberland lake district, and took up their abode in the small house in Hertford street, furnished by Ellinor before her marriage.

Hers has been a short courtship; all the sweet uncertainties, the doubts, the dreams, the fears, the hope, which make up the poetical prologue to a love-match, have been wanting in this marriage, ordained by the will of her late uncle—this marriage, which is founded on esteem and not on affection; this marriage, into which she has entered on the generous impulse of an impetuous nature that has never learned to repress emotion.

Is she happy? Can this cold esteem, this calm respect which she feels for the man chosen for her by another, satisfy the ardent heart of the romantic girl?

She has been already married six weeks, and she has not seen Horace Margrave, the only friend she has in England, except, of course, her husband, since her wedding-day. Not since that sunny May morning on which he took her icy hand in his and gave her, as her guardian and the representative of her dead father, into her husband's arms. She remembered that on that day when his hand touched hers it was as cold and powerless as her own, and that his listless face was even paler than usual under the spring sunshine streaming in at the church windows; but, in spite of this, he had done the honors of the breakfast table, toasted the bride and bridegroom, complimented the bridesmaids, and fascinated everybody, with all the finished grace and marvelous ease of the all-accomplished Horace Margrave. And if Ellinor had ever thought that she had a right, for auld lang syne, for her dear father's sake, for her own lovely face, to be anything more or dearer to Mr. Margrave than the most indifferent of his clients; that thought was dispelled by the gentlemanly *sang froid* of his adieu, as the four pawing bays started off on the first stage to Windermere.

It is the end of June, and she is seated in the small drawing-room, awaiting the advent of morning visitors. They have been a week in town, and Horace Margrave has not yet called upon them. She has a weary air this morning, and she seems to seek in vain for something to occupy her. Now she strolls to the open piano, and plays a few chords, or a brilliant run, or softly touches the notes of some pensive air, and sings some Italian words; now she takes up an uncut novel from the table, and reads a page or two here and there, wherever the book opens; she walks to an embroidery frame, and takes a great deal of trouble in selecting and comparing wools, and threading needles, but when this is accomplished, she does not do three stitches; then she loiters listlessly about the room, looking at the pictures, chiefly valuable engravings, which adorn the pale silver-gray walls; but at last she is so utterly weary, that she flings herself into a deep easy-chair close to the open window, and sits idly looking down, across a lilliputian forest of heliotropes and geraniums, into the hot, sunny street.

She is looking very lovely; but she is not looking at all happy. The rich masses of her dark brown hair are swept away from her broad, low brow, and secured in a coil of superb plaits at the back of her head; her simple white morning dress is only ornamented by large knots of broad violet ribbon, and she wears no jewelry whatever, except a tiny, slender gold chain, which she twists perpetually in and out of her white fingers.

She sits for about half an hour, always looking down across the plants in the balcony at the pavement opposite, when she suddenly starts, and wrenches the thin chain off her fingers in her agitation.

She has seen the person for whom she has been waiting. A gentleman, who lounges lazily along the other side of the street, crosses the road beneath the window, and knocks at the door.

"At last!" she says; "now, perhaps, this mystery will be explained."

A servant announces, "Mr. Margrave."

"At last!" she says again, rising as he enters the room. "Oh, Mr. Margrave, I have been so anxious to see you!"

He looks about on the crowded table to find, amongst its fashionable litter, a place for his hat, fails in doing so, and puts it down on a chair, and only then looks listlessly up at her and says:

"Anxious to see me, my dear Ellinor; why anxious?"

"Because there are two or three questions which I must ask—which you must answer."

That peculiar expression in Horace Margrave's eyes, which was as it were a shiver of the eyelids, passed

over them now; but it was too brief to be perceived by Ellinor Dalton. He sank lazily into a chair; near her own, but not opposite to it. He paused to place this chair with its back to the light, and then said:

"My dear Ellinor, my dear Mrs. Dalton, what questions can you have to ask me, but questions of a purely business character; and even those, I imagine, your husband, who is quite as practical a man as myself, could answer as well as I?"

"Mr. Dalton is the very last person to whom I can apply for an answer to the questions which I have to ask!"

"And why the last person?"

"Because those questions relate to himself!"

"Oh, I see! My dear Mrs. Dalton, is not this rather a bad beginning? You appeal from your husband to your solicitor."

"No, Mr. Margrave. I appeal to my guardian!"

"Pardon me, my dear Ellinor, there is no such person. He is defunct; he is extinct. From the moment I placed your hand in that of your husband on the altar steps of St. George's, Hanover Square, my duties, my right to advise you, and your right to consult me, expired. Henceforth you have but one guardian, one adviser, one friend, and his name is Henry Dalton."

A sad shade fell over Ellinor Dalton's handsome face, and her eyes half filled with tears as she said:

"Mr. Margrave, heaven forbid that I should say a word which could be construed into a reproach to you. Your duties of guardianship, undertaken at the prayer of my dying father, have been as truly and conscientiously discharged as such duties should be discharged by a man of your high position and unblemished character; but I will own that sometimes, with a woman's folly, I have wished that, for the memory of my dead father, who loved and trusted you, for the memory of the departed childhood, in which we were companions and friends, some feeling a little warmer, a little kinder, a little more affectionate, something of the tenderness of an elder brother, might have mingled with your punctilious fulfillment of the duties of guardian. I would not for the world reproach you—still less reproach you for an act for which I only am responsible—yet I cannot but remember that, if it had been so, this marriage might never have taken place."

"It is not a happy marriage then?"

"It is a most unhappy one."

Horace Margrave is silent for a few moments, and then says, gravely, almost sadly:

"My dear Mrs. Henry Dalton," he is especially scrupulous in calling her Mrs. Dalton, as if he were anxious to remind her every moment how much their relations have changed—"when you accuse me of a want of tenderness in my conduct towards yourself, of an absence of warm regard for the memory of your dead father, my kind and excellent friend, you accuse me of that for which I am no more responsible than for the color of my hair, or the outline of my face. You accuse me of that which is, perhaps, the curse of my existence; a heart incapable of cherishing a strong affection, or a sincere friendship for any living being. Behold me, at five-and-thirty years of age, unloved and unloving, without one tie which I cannot as easily break as I can pay my hotel bill or pack my portmanteau. My life, at its brightest, is a dreary one. A dreary present, which can neither look back to a fairer past, nor forward to a happier future!"

His deep, musical voice falls into a sadder cadence as he says these last words, and he looks down gloomily at the point of the cane he carries, with which he absently traces a pattern upon the carpet. After a short silence he looks up and says:

"But you wished to make some inquiries of me?"

"I did. I do. When I married Mr. Dalton, what settlements were made? You told me nothing at the time; and I, so utterly unused to business matters, asked you no questions. Besides, I had then reason to think him the most honorable of men."

"What settlements were made?" He repeats her question, as if it were the last of all others which he expected to hear.

"Yes, my fortune! How much of it was settled on myself?"

"Not one penny!" She gives a start of surprise, which he answers in his most *nonchalant* manner. "Not one penny of it! There was no mention whatever of anything like a settlement in your uncle's will. He left his money to you; but he left it to you only on condition that you shared it with his adopted and beloved son, Henry Dalton. This implies not only a strong affection for, but an implicit faith in, the young man. To tie up your money, or to settle it on yourself, would be to nullify your uncle's will. The man that could be trusted by him, could be trusted by you. This is why I never suggested a settlement. I may have, perhaps, acted in rather an unwelcome manner; but I do believe, my dear Ellinor, that I acted in the only manner consonant with your late uncle's affectionate provisions for the two persons nearest and dearest to him?"

"Then Henry Dalton is sole master of my—the fortune?"

"As your husband, decidedly yes."

"And he may, if he pleases, sell the Arden Estate?"

"The Arden Estate is not entailed. Certainly he may sell it, if he wishes."

"Then, Mr. Margrave, I must inform you that he does wish to sell it; that he does intend to sell it."

"To sell Arden Hall?"

"Yes!"

An angry flush lights up her face, as she looks eagerly into the lawyer's eyes for one flash of surprise or indignation. She looks in vain.

"Well, my dear Mrs. Dalton, in my opinion he shows himself a very sensible fellow, by determining on such a proceeding. Arden is one of the dearest, coldest, and most tumbled-down old piles of building in all England. It possesses all the leading features of

a country mansion; magnificent oak panelling, contemptible servants' offices; three secret staircases, and not one register stove; six tapestried chambers, and no bath room; a dozen Leonardo da Vinci's, and not one door that does not let in assassination, in the shape of a north-east wind; a deer park, and no deer; three gamekeepers' lodges, and not game enough to tempt the most fatigued of poachers! Sell Arden Hall! Nothing could be more desirable; but, alas! my dear Ellinor, your husband is not the man I took him for, if he calculates upon finding a purchaser!"

She looks at him with not a little contempt, as she says:

"But the want of feeling; the outrage upon the memory of my poor uncle!"

"Your poor uncle will not be remembered a day longer through your retaining possession of a draughty and uncomfortable house. When did Dalton tell you that he meant to sell Arden?"

"On our return from our tour. I suggested that we should live there—that is, of course, out of the season."

"And he?"

"Replied that it was out of the question our ever residing there, as the place must be sold."

"You asked him his reasons?"

"I did. He told me that he was unable to reveal those reasons to me, and might never be able to reveal them. He said, that if I loved him, I could trust him, and believe in him, and believe that the course he took, however strange it might appear to me, was, in reality, the best and wisest course he could take."

"But, in spite of this, you doubt him?" he asks, earnestly.

"How can I do otherwise? Of the fortune which I have brought to him, he refuses to allow me a penny. He, the husband of a rich woman, enjoins economy—economy even in the smallest details. I dare not order a jewel, a picture, an elegant piece of furniture, a stand of hothouse flowers; for, if I do so, I am told that the expenditure is beyond his present means, and that I must wait till we have more money at our command. Then again, his profession is a thousand times dearer to him than I. No briefless, penniless barrister, with a mother and a sister to support, ever worked harder than he works, ever devoted himself more religiously than he devotes himself to the drudging routine of the bar."

"Ellinor Dalton, your husband is as high-minded and conscientious a man as ever drew the breath of human life. I seldom take the trouble of making a vehement assertion; so believe me if you can, now that I do! Believe me, even if you cannot believe him!"

"You, too, against me," she said mournfully. "Oh, believe me, it is not the money for which I wish! It is not the possession of the money which I grudge him; it is only that my heart sinks at the thought of being united to a man I cannot respect or esteem. I did not ask to love him," she added, half to herself; "but I did pray that I might be able at least to esteem him."

"I can only say, Ellinor, that you are mistaken in him."

At this very moment they hear a quick, firm step on the stairs, and Henry Dalton himself enters the room. His face is bright and cheerful, and he advances to his wife eagerly; but, at the sight of Horace Margrave, falls back, with a frown.

"Mr. Margrave, I thought it was part of our agreement that—"

The lawyer interrupts him—

"That I should never darken this threshold. Yes."

Ellinor looks from one to the other, with a pale, frightened face.

"Henry, Henry!" she exclaimed, "Mr. Dalton, what, in Heaven's name, does this mean?"

"Nothing that in the least can affect you, Ellinor. A business disagreement between myself, and Mr. Margrave; nothing more!"

His wife looks away from him, scornfully, and turning to Horace Margrave, rests her hand on the scroll-work at the back of the chair in which he is seated.

It is so small an action in itself; but it says, as plainly as words could ever speak—"It is he whom I trust, in spite of you, in spite of the world."

It is not lost on Henry Dalton, who looks at her with a grave, reproachful glance, and says:

"Under these circumstances, then, Mr. Margrave—"

"I had no right to come here. Granted! and I should not come, but—"

He hesitated a moment, and Ellinor interrupted him—

"I wrote to my guardian, requesting him to call on me. Mr. Dalton, what is the meaning of this? What mystery does all this conceal? Am I to see my best and oldest friend insulted in my own house?"

"A married woman has no friend but her husband; and I may not choose to receive Mr. Margrave as a visitor in our house," Henry Dalton says, coldly and gravely.

"You shall not be troubled any longer with Horace Margrave's society, Mr. Dalton." The lawyer rises as he speaks, and walks slowly to the door. "Good-morning." He has his hand upon the lock, when he turns, and, with a tone of suppressed emotion in his voice, says to Mrs. Dalton, "Ellinor, shake hands with me." She extended both her hands to him. He catches them in his, bends his dark head over them for a moment, as he holds them in his grasp, and then says, "Forgive me, Ellinor, and farewell!"

He is gone. She rushes out on the landing-place, and cries after him:

"Mr. Margrave, guardian; Horace, come back—if only for one moment, come back!"

Her husband follows her, and catching her slender wrist in his strong hand, leads her into the drawing-room.

"Ellinor Dalton, choose between that man and me. Seek to renew your acquaintance with him, or hold any

communication whatever with him, that does not pass through my hands, and we part forever!"

She falls sobbing into her chair.

"My only friend," she cries; "my only, only friend, and to be parted from him thus!"

Her husband stands at a little distance from her, earnestly, sadly watching her, as she gives passionate vent to her wild outburst of emotion.

"What wretchedness! what utter wretchedness!" he says aloud. "And no hope of a termination to it, no chance of an end to our misery!"

CHAPTER VI.

HORACE MARGRAVE AT BALDWIN COURT.

HENRY DALTON prospered in his beloved profession. Gray-headed old judges talked over their after-dinner port of the wonderful acumen displayed by the young barrister in the most important and difficult cases. One, two, three years passed away, and the name of Dalton began to be one of mark upon the Northern circuit. The dawn often found him working in his chambers in Paper Buildings, while his handsome wife was dancing at some brilliant assembly, or listening to the rapid platitudes of one of her numerous admirers and silent adorers. With Ellinor Dalton, to be unhappy was to be reckless. Hers was that impulsive and emotional nature which cannot brood upon its griefs in the quiet circle of a solitary home. She considered herself wronged by her husband's parsimony, still more deeply wronged by his cold reserve, and she sought in the gayest circles of fashionable London for the peace which had never dwelt at her cold and deserted hearth.

"His profession is all in all to him," she said; "but there is at least the world left for me; and, if I cannot be loved, I will prove to him that, at any rate, I can be admired."

At many of the houses in which she was a constant visitor, Horace Margrave was also a familiar guest. The fashionable and wealthy bachelor lawyer was sure of a welcome wherever mamma had daughters to marry or papa money to invest or mortgages to effect. To her old guardian Ellinor's manner never underwent the slightest shade of a change.

"You may refuse to admit him here; you may forbid my correspondence with him. I acknowledge the right you exercise so harshly," she would say to her husband; but you cannot shake my faith in my dead father's friend. You cannot control my sentiments towards the guardian of my childhood."

But by degrees she found that Horace Margrave was to be seen less frequently every day at those houses in which he visited; it was growing a rare thing now for her to see the dark, handsome head proudly overtopping the crowd in which the lawyer mingled; and even when she did meet him, though his voice had still its old gentleness, there was a tacit avoidance of her in his manner, which effectually checked any confidence between them. This was for the first two years after her marriage; in the third she heard accidentally that Horace Margrave was traveling in Switzerland, and had left the entire management of his very extensive business to his junior partner.

In the autumn of the third year from that of her marriage, Ellinor was staying with her husband at the country house of his friend, Sir Lionel Baldwin. Since that day on which the scene with Horace Margrave had taken place in the little drawing-room in Hertford street, Ellinor Dalton and her husband had had no explanation whatever. On that day, the young man had fallen on his knees at the feet of his sobbing wife, and had, most earnestly implored her to believe in his faith and honor, and to believe that, in everything he did, he had a motive so strong and so disinterested, as to warrant his actions. He begged her to believe, also, that the marriage, on his part, had been wholly a love-match, that he had been actuated by no mercenary considerations whatever; and that if he now withheld the money to which, in all appearance, she had so good a right, it was because it was not in his power to lavish it upon her. But he implored in vain. Prejudiced against him from the very first, she had only trusted him for a brief period, to doubt him more completely than ever at the first suspicion that suggested itself. Wounded in her affection for another—an affection whose strength, perhaps, she scarcely dared to whisper to her own soul—her feeling for Henry Dalton became one almost bordering on aversion. His simple, practical good sense; his plain, unpolished manners; his persevering, energetic and untiring pursuit of a vocation for which she had no sympathy—all these jarred upon her romantic and enthusiastic temperament, and blinded her to his actual merits. The world, which always contrives to know everything, very soon made itself completely acquainted with the eccentric conditions of Mr. Arden's will, and the circumstances of Henry Dalton's marriage.

It was known to be a marriage of convenience, and not of affection. He was a very lucky fellow, and she was very much to be pitied. This was the general opinion, which Ellinor's palpable indifference to her husband went strongly to confirm.

Mr. and Mrs. Dalton had been staying for a week at Baldwin Court, when the young barrister was compelled, by his professional pursuits, to leave his wife for a few days under the protection of his old friends, Sir Lionel and Lady Baldwin.

"You will be very happy here, dear Ellinor," he said. "The house is full of pleasant people, and you know how great a favorite you are with our host and hostess. You will not miss me," he added, with a sigh, as he looked at her indifferent face.

"Miss you! Oh, pray do not alarm yourself, Mr. Dalton! I am not so used to usurp your time or attention. I know where your professional duties are concerned, how small a consideration I am to you."

"I should not work hard were I not compelled to do

so, Ellinor," he said, with a shade of reproach visible in his voice.

"My dear Mr. Dalton," she answered, coldly, "I have no taste for mysteries. You are perfectly free to pursue your own course."

So they parted. She bade him adieu with as much well-bred indifference as if he had been her jeweler or her haberdasher. As the light little phaeton drove him off to the railway station, he looked up to the chintz-curtained windows of his wife's apartments, and said to himself, "How long is this to endure, I wonder?—this unmerited wretchedness, this most cruel misconception!"

The morning after Henry Dalton's departure, as Sir Lionel Baldwin, seated at breakfast, opened the letter-bag, he exclaimed, with a tone of mingled surprise and pleasure, "So the wanderer has returned! At the very bottom of the bag I can see Horace Margrave's dashing superscription. He has returned to England, then!"

He handed his visitors their letters, and then opened his own, reserving the lawyer's epistle till the last.

"This is delightful! Horace will be down here to-night."

Ellinor Dalton's cheek grew pale at the announcement; for the mysterious feud between her guardian and her husband flashed upon her mind. She would meet him here, then, alone. Now, or never, might she learn this secret—this secret which, no doubt, involved some meanness on the part of Henry Dalton, the apothecary's son.

"Margrave will be an immense acquisition to our party—will he not, gentlemen?" asked Sir Lionel.

"An acquisition! Well, really now, I don't know about that," drawled a young government clerk from Whitehall. "Do you know, S'Lionel" (all the young men under government called the old baronet S'Lionel, any other pronunciation of his name and title involving a degree of exertion beyond their physical powers), "do you know, it's my opinion, S'Lionel, that Horace Margrave is used up. I met him at—at what-you-may-call-it—Rousseau and Gibbon, Childs Harold and the Nouvelle Heloise. You know the place," he said vaguely: "somewhere in Switzerland, in short, last July, and I never saw a man so altered in my life."

"Altered!" exclaimed the baronet. Ellinor Dalton's face grew paler still.

"Yes, upon my honor, S'Lionel. Very much altered, indeed. You don't think he ever committed a murder, or anything of that kind—do you?" said the young man reflectively, as he drew over a basin and deliberately dropped four or five lumps of sugar into his coffee; "because, upon my honor, he looked like that sort of thing."

"My dear Fred, don't be a fool. Looked like what sort of thing?"

"You know; a guilty conscience, Lara, Manfred. You understand. Upon my word," added the youthful official, looking round with a languid laugh, "he had such a Wandering Jew-ish and ultra-Byronic appearance when I met him suddenly among some very uncomfortable kind of chromo-lithographic mountain scenery, that I asked him if he had an appointment with the Witch of the Alps, or any of those sort of people?"

One or two country visitors tried to laugh, but couldn't; and the guests from town only stared, as the young man looked round the table. Ellinor Dalton never took her eyes from his face, but seemed to wait anxiously for any thing he might say next.

"Perhaps Margrave has been ill," said the old baronet; "he told me, when he went to Switzerland, that he was leaving England because he required change of air and scene."

"Ill!" said the government clerk. "Ah, to be sure: I never thought of that. He might have been ill. It's difficult, sometimes, to draw the line between a guilty conscience and the liver complaint. Perhaps it was only his liver, after all. But you don't think," he said, appealingly, returning to his original idea, "you don't think he has committed a murder, and buried the body in Verulam Buildings—do you? That would account for his going to Switzerland, you know; for he couldn't possibly stop with the body—could he?"

"You'd better ask him the question yourself, Fred," said Sir Lionel, laughing; "if everybody had as good a conscience as Horace Margrave, the world would be better stocked than it is with honorable men. Horace is a noble-hearted fellow; I've known him from a boy. He's a glorious fellow."

"And a crack shot," said a young military man, with his mouth full of buttered toast and anchovy paste.

"And a first-rate billiard player," added his next neighbor, busy carving a ham.

"And one of the cleverest men in the law," said a grave old gentleman, sententiously.

"Extremely handsome," faltered one young lady.

"And then, how accomplished!" ventured another.

"Then you don't think, really now, that he has committed a murder, and buried the body in his chambers?" asked the Whitehall employee, putting the question to the company generally.

In the dusk of that autumnal evening, Ellinor Dalton sat alone in a tiny drawing-room leading out of the great saloon, which was a long room, with six windows, and two fireplaces, and with a great many very indifferent pictures in extremely handsome frames.

This tiny drawing-room was a favorite retreat of Ellinor's. It was luxuriously furnished, and it communicated, by a half-glass door shrouded by heavy amber damask curtains, with a large conservatory, which opened on to the terrace walk that ran along one side of the house. Here she sat in the dusky light, pensive and thoughtful, on the evening after her husband's departure. The gentlemen were all in the billiard-room, hard at work with balls and cues, trying to settle some disputed wager before the half-hour bell rang to summon them to their dressing-rooms. The ladies were already at their toilettes; and Ellinor, who had dressed earlier than usual, was quite alone. It was too dark for her to read or work, and she was too weary

and listless to ring for lamps; so she sat with her hands lying idly in her lap, pondering upon what had been said at the breakfast table of her sometime guardian, Horace Margrave.

Suddenly a footstep behind her, falling softly on the thick carpet, roused her from her reverie, and she looked up with a startled glance at the glass over the low chimney-piece.

In the dim firelight she saw, reflected in the shadowy depths of the mirror, the haggard and altered face of her guardian, Horace Margrave.

He wore a loose, heavy great-coat, and had his hat in his hand. He had evidently only just arrived.

He drew back on seeing Ellinor; but, as she turned round to speak to him, the firelight behind her left her face in the shadow, and he did not recognize her.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "for disturbing you. I have been looking everywhere for Sir Lionel."

"Mr. Margrave! Don't you know me? It is I—Ellinor!"

His hat fell from his slender hand, and he leaned against a high-backed easy-chair for support.

"Ellinor—Mrs. Dalton—you here! I—I—heard you were in Paris, or I should never—that is—"

For the first time in her life Ellinor Dalton saw Horace Margrave so agitated that the stony mask of elegant indifference and gentlemanly sang-froid, which he ordinarily wore, entirely dropped away, and left him—himself.

"Mr. Margrave," she said, anxiously, "you are annoyed at seeing me here. Oh, how altered you are! They were right in what they said this morning. You are indeed altered. You must have been very ill."

Horace Margrave was himself again by this time. He picked up his hat, and, dropping lazily into the easy-chair, said:

"Yes; I have had rather a severe attack—fever—exhaustion. The doctors, in fact, were so puzzled as to what they should call my illness that they actually tried to persuade me that I had nerves like a young lady who has been jilted by a life-guardsmen, or forbidden by her parents to marry a country curate with seventy pounds per annum, and three duties every Sunday. A nervous lawyer! My dear Mrs. Dalton, can you imagine anything so absurd? Sir James Clarke, however, insisted on my packing my portmanteau, and setting off for Mount Blanc, or something of that kind; and I, being heartily tired of the Courts of Probate and Chancery, and Verulam Buildings, Gray's Inn, was only too glad to follow his advice, and take my railway ticket for Geneva."

"And Switzerland has restored you?"

"In a measure, perhaps; but not entirely. You can see that I am not yet very strong, when even the pleasing emotion of meeting unexpectedly with my sometime ward is almost too much for my ultra-ladylike nerves. But you were saying, my dear Mrs. Dalton, that they had been talking of me here."

"Oh, at the breakfast-table this morning. When your visit was announced, one of the gentlemen said he had met you in Switzerland, and that you were looking ill—unhappy."

"Unhappy! Ah, my dear Mrs. Dalton, what a misfortune it is for a man to have a constitutional pallor, and a head of dark hair! The world will insist upon elevating him into a blighted being, with a chronic wolf hard at work under his waistcoat. I knock myself up by working too hard over a difficult will case, in which some tiresome old man leaves his youngest son forty thousand pounds upon half a sheet of note-paper; and the world, meeting me in Switzerland, traveling to recruit myself, comes home and writes me down—unhappy! Now, isn't it too bad? If I were blessed with red hair and a fat face, I might break my heart once in three months without any of my sympathetic friends troubling themselves about the fracture."

"My dear Mr. Margrave," said Ellinor—her voice, in spite of herself, trembling a little—"I am really now quite an old married woman; and, presuming on that fact, may venture to speak to you with entire candor, may I not?"

"With entire candor, certainly." There is the old shiver in the dark eyelashes, and the white lids droop over the handsome brown eyes, as Horace Margrave looks down at the hat which swings backwards and forwards in his listless hand.

"Then, Mr. Margrave, my dear guardian, for I will— I will call you by that old name, which I can remember speaking for the very first time on the day of my poor father's funeral. Oh!" she added, passionately, "how well—how well I remember that dreary, wretched, terrible day! I can see you now, as I saw you then, standing in the deep embrasure of the window in the little library, in the dear, dear Scottish home, looking down at me so compassionately, with dark, mournful eyes. I was such a child then. I can hear your low, deep voice, as I heard it on that day, saying to me, 'Ellinor, your dead father has placed a solemn trust in my hands. I am young. I may not be as good or as high-minded as a man as, to his confiding mind, I seemed to be; there may be something of constitutional weakness and irresolution in my character, which may render me, perhaps, by no means the fittest person he could have chosen for your guardian; but so deeply do I feel the trust implied in his dying words, that I swear, by my hope in heaven, by my memory of the dead, by my honor as a man and a gentleman, to discharge the responsibilities imposed upon me, as an honest man and an honorable gentleman should discharge them!'"

"Ellinor! Ellinor! for pity's sake!" he cried, in a broken voice, clasping one white hand convulsively over his averted face.

"I do wrong," she said, "to recall that melancholy day. You did—you did discharge every duty nobly, honestly, honorably; but now—now you abandon me entirely to the husband, not of my choice, but imposed upon me by a hard and cruel necessity, and you do all in your power to make us strangers. Yet, guardian—Horace—you are not happy!"

"Not happy!" He raises his head, and laughs bitterly. "My dear Mrs. Dalton, this is such childish talk about happiness and unhappiness—two words which are only used in a lady's novel, in which the heroine is unhappy through two volumes and three-quarters, and unutterably blest in the last chapter. In the practical world we don't talk about happiness and unhappiness; our phrases are, failure and success. A man gets the woollack, and he is successful; or he tries for it all his life, and never gets it—and we shrug our shoulders and say that he is unfortunate. But a happy man, my dear Ellinor—did you ever see one?"

"You mystify me, Mr. Margrave; but you do not answer me."

"Because, Mrs. Dalton, to answer you I must first question myself; and believe me, a man must have considerable courage who can dare to ask himself whether, in this tiresome journey of life, he has taken the right or the wrong road. I confess myself a coward, and implore you not to compel me to be brave."

He rose as he finished speaking, and, looking down at his dress, continued:

"The first dinner-bell rang a quarter of an hour ago, and behold me still in traveling costume; the sin is yours, Miss Dalton. Till dinner time, adieu!"

Ellinor, left alone, sank into a gloomy reverie.

"What—what can be the mystery of this man's life?" she murmured to herself. "If I dared—but no, no! I dare not answer that question."

It was difficult to recognize the gloomy and bitter Horace Margrave of half an hour before in the brilliant and versatile visitor who sat at Sir Lionel's right hand, and whose incessant flow of witty *persiflage* kept the crowded dinner-table in a roar of laughter. Ellinor, charmed in spite of herself, beguiled out of herself by the fascination of his animated conversation, wondered at the extraordinary power possessed by this man.

"So brilliant, so accomplished," she thought; "so admired, prosperous, and successful, and yet so unhappy."

That evening the post brought Ellinor a letter which had been sent to her town house, and forwarded thence to Sir Lionel's.

She started on seeing the direction, and, taking it into the little inner drawing-room, which was still untenanted, he read it by the light of the wax candle on the chimney-piece. She returned to the long saloon after refolding her letter, and, crossing over to a hall table, at which Horace Margrave sat, bending over a portfolio of engravings, she seated herself near him, and said:

"Mr. Margrave! I have just received a letter from Scotland."

"From Scotland!"

"Yes. From the dear old minister, James Stewart. You remember him?"

"Yes; a white-headed old man, with a family of daughters, the shortest of whom was taller than I. Do you correspond with him?"

"Oh! no. It is so many years since I left Scotland, that my dear old friends seem one by one to have dropped off. I should like so much to have given them a new church at Achindore, but Mr. Dalton of course objected to the outlay of money; and as that is a point I never dispute with him, I abandoned the idea; but Mr. Stewart has written to me this time for a special purpose."

"And that is?"

"To tell me that my old nurse, Margaret Mackay, has become blind and infirm, and has been obliged to leave her situation. Poor dear old soul! she went into a service in Edinburgh, after my poor father's death, and I entirely lost sight of her. I should have provided for her long before this had I known where to find her; but now there is no question about this appeal, and I shall immediately settle a hundred a year upon her, in spite of Mr. Dalton's rigid and praiseworthy economy."

"I fancy Dalton will think a hundred a year too much. Fifty pounds for an old woman in the north of Aberdeenshire would be almost fabulous wealth; but you are so superb in your notions, my dear Ellinor, hard-headed business men, like Dalton and myself, can scarcely stand against you."

"Pray do not compare yourself to Mr. Dalton," said Ellinor, with quiet scorn.

"I'm afraid, indeed, I must not," he answered gravely; "but you were saying—"

"That in this matter I will take no refusal; no pitiful and contemptible excuses or prevarications. I shall write to him by to-morrow's post. I cannot get an answer till the next day. If that answer should be either a refusal or an excuse, I know what course to take."

"And that course?"

"I will tell you what it is, when I receive Henry Dalton's reply. But I am unjust to him," she said, "he cannot refuse to comply with this request."

Three days after this conversation, just as the half-hour bell had rung, and as Sir Lionel's visitors were all hurrying off to their dressing-rooms, Ellinor laid her hand lightly on Horace Margrave's arm, as he was leaving the large drawing-room, and said:

"Pray let me speak to you for a few minutes. I have received Mr. Dalton's answer to my letter."

"And that answer?" he asks, as he follows her into the little room communicating with the conservatory.

"Is, as you suggested it might be, a refusal."

"A refusal!" He elevates his dark, arched eyebrows faintly, but seems very little surprised at the intelligence.

"Yes; a refusal. He dares not even attempt an excuse, or invent a reason for his conduct. Forty pounds a year, he says, will be a comfortable competence for an old woman in the north of Scotland, where very few ministers of the Presbyterian church have a larger income. That sum he will settle on her immediately, and he sends me a check for the first half-year. But he will settle no more, nor will he endeavor to explain

motives which are always misconstrued. What do you think of his conduct?"

As she spoke, the glass door, which separated the tiny boudoir from the conservatory, swung backwards and forwards in the autumn breeze, which blew in through the outer door of the conservatory; for the day having been unusually warm for the time of year, this door had been left open.

"My dear Ellinor," said Horace Margrave, "if any one should come into the conservatory, they might hear us talking of your husband."

"Every one is dressing," she answered, carelessly. "Besides, if any one were there, they would scarcely be surprised to hear me declare my contempt for Henry Dalton. The world does not, I hope, give us credit for being a happy couple."

"As you will; but I am sure I heard some one stirring in that conservatory. But no matter. You ask me what I think of your husband's conduct in refusing to allow a superannuated nurse of yours more than forty pounds a year? Don't think me a heartless ruffian, if I tell you that I think he is perfectly right."

"But to withhold from me my own money! To fetter my almsgiving! To control my very charities! I might forgive him, if he refused me a diamond necklace, or a pair of ponies; but in this matter, in which my affection is concerned, to let his economy step in to frustrate my earnestly expressed wishes—it is too cruel."

"My dear Mrs. Dalton, like all very impetuous and warm-hearted people, you are rather given to jump at conclusions. Mr. Dalton, you say, withholds your own money from you. Now, your own money, with the exception of the Arden estate, which he sold on your marriage, happens to have been invested entirely in the Three per Cents. Now suppose—mind, I haven't the least reason to suppose that such a thing has ever happened, but for the sake of putting a case—suppose Henry Dalton, as a clever and enterprising man of business, should have been tempted to speculate with some of your money?"

"Without consulting me?"

"Without consulting you. Decidedly. What do women know of speculation?"

"Mr. Margrave, if Henry Dalton has done this, he is no longer a miser, but he is—a cheat. The money left to me by my uncle's will was mine. To be shared with him, it is true, but still mine. No sophistry, no lawyer's quibble, could ever have made it his. If, then, he has, without my consent or knowledge, speculated with that money, I no longer despise him as a miser, but I detest him as a dishonest man. Ah! Horace Margrave, you with noble blood in your veins; you a gentleman, an honorable man; what would you think of Henry Dalton, if this were possible?"

"Ellinor Dalton, have you ever heard of the madness men have christened gambling? Do you know what a gambler is! Do you know what he feels, this man who hazards his wife's fortune, his widowed mother's slender pittance, his helpless children's inheritance, the money that should pay for his eldest son's education, his daughter's dowry, the hundreds that is due to his trusting creditors, or the gold intrusted to him by a confiding employer, on the green cloth of a West-end gaming-table? Do you think that at that mad moment, when the gas-lamp dazzles his eyes, and the piles of gold heave up and down upon the restless green baize, and the croupier's voice, crying, 'Make your game!' is multiplied by a million, and deafens his bewildered ear like the clamor of all the fiends; do you think that at that moment that he ever supposes that he is going to lose this money which is not honestly his? No; he is going to double, to treble, to quadruple it; to multiply every glistening guinea by a hundred, and to take it back to the starving wife or the anxious children, and cry, 'Was I so much to blame, after all?' Have you ever stood upon the Grand Stand at Epsom, and seen the white faces of the betting men, and heard the noise of the eager voices upon the final rush to the winning-post? Every man upon that crowded stand, every creature upon that crowded course, from the great magnate of the turf, who stands to win a quarter of a million, to the wretched apprentice lad, who has stolen half a crown from the till to put it upon the favorite, believes that he has backed a winning horse. That is the great madness of gaming; that is the terrible witchcraft of the gambling-house and the ring; and that is the miserable hallucination of the man who speculates upon the fortune of another. Pity him, Ellinor. If the dishonest are ever worthy of the pity of the good, that man deserves your pity."

He had spoken with an energy unusual to him, and he sank into a chair, half-exhausted with his unwonted vehemence.

"I would rather think the man, who I am forced to call my husband, a miser, than a cheat, Mr. Margrave," Ellinor said coldly; and I am sorry, to learn, that if he were indeed capable of such dishonor, his crime would find an advocate in you."

"You are pitiless, Mrs. Dalton," said Horace Margrave, after a pause. Heaven help the man who dares to wrong you."

"Do not let us speak of Henry Dalton any longer, Mr. Margrave. I told you that if he should refuse this favor, this—right, I had decided on what course to take."

"You did; and now, may I ask what that course is?"

"To leave him."

"Leave him!" he exclaimed, anxiously.

"Yes; leave him in the possession of this fortune which he holds so tightly, or which, supposing him to be the pitiful wretch you think he may have been, he has speculated with, and lost. Leave him. He can never have cared for me. He has denied my every request, frustrated my every wish, devoted every hour of his life, not to me, but to his beloved profession. My aunt will receive me. I shall leave this place to-morrow morning."

"But, Ellinor, the world!"

"Let the world judge between us. What can the world say of me? I shall live with my aunt, as I did before this cruel fortune was bequeathed to me. Mr. Margrave—guardian—you will accompany me to Paris, will you not? I am so inexperienced in all these sort of things, so little used to help myself, that I dare not take this journey alone. You will accompany me?"

"I, Ellinor?" Again the dark eyelashes shiver over the gloomy brown eyes.

"Yes; who so fit to protect me as you, to whom with his dying lips my father committed my guardianship? For his sake, you will do me this service, will you not?"

"Is it a service, Ellinor? Can I be doing you a service in taking you away from your husband?"

"So be it, then," she said scornfully. "You refuse to help me; I will go alone."

"Alone?"

"Yes; alone. I go to-night, and alone."

A bright flush mounted to Horace Margrave's pale face, and a vivid light shone in his handsome eyes.

"Alone, Ellinor? No, no," he said, "my poor child, my ward, my helpless orphan girl, my little Scotch lassie of the good time gone, I will protect you on this journey, place you safely in the arms of your aunt, and answer to Henry Dalton for my conduct. In this, at least, Ellinor, I will be worthy of your dead father's confidence. Make your arrangements for your journey. You have your maid with you?"

"Yes, Ellis, a most excellent creature. Then, to-night, guardian, by the mail train."

"I shall be ready. You must make your excuse to Sir Lionel, and leave with as little explanation as possible. *Au revoir!*"

As Ellinor Dalton and Horace Margrave left the little boudoir, a gentleman in a great-coat, with a railway rug flung over his shoulder, strode out on to the terrace through the door of the conservatory, and lighting a cigar, paced for about half an hour up and down the walk at the side of the house, thinking deeply.

CHAPTER V.

FROM LONDON TO PARIS.

WHILE dressing, Ellinor gave her maid orders to set about packing immediately. Ellis, a very solemn and matter-of-fact person, expressed no surprise, but went quietly to work, emptying the contents of wardrobes into imperials, and fitting silver-topped bottles into their velvet-line cases, as if there were no such thing as hurry or agitation in the world.

It was a long evening to Ellinor Dalton. Every quarter that chimed its silver tones from the ormolu time-piece over the chimney seemed an entire hour to her. Never had the county families appeared so insufferably stupid, or the London visitors so supremely tiresome. The young man from the War Office took her into dinner, and insisted on telling her some very funny story about a young man in another government office, which brilliant anecdote lasted, exclusive of interruptions, from the soup to the dessert, without drawing nearer the point of witticism. After the dreary dinner, the eldest daughter of the oldest of the county families fastened herself and a very difficult piece of crochet upon her, and inflicted all the agonies of a worsted-work rose, which, as the young lady perpetually declared, would not come right.

But however *distract* Ellinor might be, Horace Margrave was not Horace of the West-end world. He talked politics with the heads of the county families; stock exchange with the city men; sporting magazine and Tattersall's with the country swells; discussed the last *debuts* at Her Majesty's Theater with the young Londoners; spoke of Sir John Herschell's last discovery to a scientific country squire; and of the newest thing in farming implements to an agricultural ditto; talked compliments to the young country ladies, and the freshest May-fair scandal to the young London ladies; had, in short, something to say on every subject to everybody, without displeasing anyone. And let any man who has tried to do this in the crowded drawing-room of a country house say whether or not Horace Margrave was a clever fellow.

"By the by, Horace," said Sir Lionel, as the accomplished lawyer lounged against one corner of the long marble mantelpiece, talking to a group of young men and one rather fast young lady, who had edged herself into the circle under cover of a brother, much to the indignation of more timid spirits, who sat modestly aloof, furtively regarding Admirable Crichton Margrave, as his friends called him, from distant sofas: "by the by, my boy, where did you hide yourself all this morning? We sadly wanted you to decide a match at billiards, and I sent people all over the house and grounds in search of you."

"I rode over to Horton after lunch," said Horace. "I wanted a few hours there on electioneering business."

"You've been to Horton?" asked Sir Lionel, with rather an anxious expression.

"Yes, my dear Sir Lionel, to Horton. But how alarmed you look! I trust I haven't been doing anything wrong. A client of mine is going to stand one whit the less the elegant and accomplished for the place. But surely you're not going to throw over the county electors, and stand for the little borough of Horton, yourself!" he said, laughing.

Sir Lionel looked a little confused, and the county families grew suddenly very grave; indeed, one young lady in pink, who was known by about seven fair *confidantes* to have a slight *tendre* for the handsome lawyer, clutched convulsively at the wrist of a younger sister in blue, and listened, with an alarmed face, to the conversation by the chimney-piece.

"Why, how silent every one has grown!" said Horace, still laughing. "It seems as if I had launched a thunderbolt upon this hospitable hearth, in announcing my visit to the little manufacturing town of Hor-

ton. What is it—why is it—how is it?" he asked, looking round with a smile.

"Why," said Sir Lionel, hesitatingly, "the—truth of the matter—that is—not to mystify you—in short—you know—they, they've a fever at Horton. The—the working classes and factory people have got it very badly, and—and—the place is in a manner tabooed. But of course," added the old man, trying to look cheerful, "you didn't go into any of the back streets, or amongst the lower classes. You only rode through the town, I suppose; so you're safe enough, my dear Horace."

The county families simultaneously drew a long breath, and the young lady in pink released her sister's wrist.

"I went, my dear Sir Lionel," said Horace, with smiling indifference, "into about twenty narrow back streets in an hour and a half, and I talked to about forty different factory hands, for I wanted to find which way the political current set in the good town of Horton. They all appeared extremely dirty, and now, I remember, a good many of them looked very ill; but I'm not afraid of having caught the fever, for all that," he added, looking round at the grave faces of his hearers; "half a dozen cigars, and a sharp ten mile's ride through a bleak, open country must be a thorough disinfectant. If not," he continued, bitterly, "one must die sooner or later, and why not of a fever caught at Horton?"

The young lady in pink had recourse to her sister's wrist again, at this speech.

Horace soon laughed off the idea of danger from his afternoon rambles, and, in a few minutes, he was singing a German drinking song, accompanying himself at the piano.

At last the long evening was over, and Ellinor, who had heard nothing from her distant work-table of the conversation about the fever, gladly welcomed the advent of a servant with a tray of glistening candlesticks. As she lit her candle at the side-table, Horace Margrave came over and lit his own.

"I have spoken to Sir Lionel," he said, "a carriage will be ready for us in an hour. The London mail does not start till one o'clock, and we shall reach town in time to catch the day service for Paris. But, Ellinor, it is not yet too late; tell me, are you thoroughly determined on this step?"

"Thoroughly," she said. "I shall be ready in an hour."

Mrs. Dalton's apartments were at the end of a long corridor; the dressing-room opened out of the bedroom, and the door of communication was ajar as Ellinor entered her room. Her boxes stood ready packed. She looked at them hurriedly, examined the addresses which her maid had pasted upon them, and was about to pass into the dressing-room, when she stopped abruptly on the threshold with an exclamation of surprise.

Her husband, Henry Dalton, was seated at the table, with an open portfolio spread before him, writing rapidly. On a chair by the fire lay his greatcoat, railway rug and portmanteau.

He looked up for a moment, calmly and gravely, as Ellinor entered, and then continued writing.

"Mr. Dalton!"

"Yes," he said, still writing; "I came down by the 5:30 train. I returned sooner than I expected."

"By the 5:30 train?" she said, anxiously; "by the train which leaves London at half-past five, I suppose," she added.

"By the train which arrives here at half-past five," he said, still not looking up; "or should reach here by that time, rather, for it's generally five minutes late."

"You have been here since six o'clock?"

"Since ten minutes to six, my dear Ellinor. I gave my valise to a porter, and walked over from the station in a quarter of an hour."

"You have been here since six, and have never told me of your arrival, never shown yourself in the house!"

"I have shown myself to Sir Lionel. I had some very important business to arrange."

"Important business?" she asked.

"Yes, to prepare for this journey to Paris, which you are so bent upon taking."

A crimson flush suffused her face, as she exclaimed:

"Mr. Dalton!"

"Yes," he said, quietly, folding and sealing a letter as he spoke, "it is very contemptible, is it not? Coming unexpectedly into the house by the conservatory entrance, which, as you know, to anyone arriving from the station, saves about two hundred yards, I heard, involuntarily, a part of a conversation, which had so great an effect upon me as to induce me, to remain where I was, and, involuntarily, hear the remainder."

"A listener?" she said, with a sneer.

"Yes; it is on a par with all the rest, is it not? An avaricious man, a money-grubbing miser; or, perhaps, even worse—a dishonest speculator with the money of other people. Oh, Ellinor Dalton, if ever the day should come (heaven forbid that I should wish to hasten it by an hour) when I shall be free to say to you about half a dozen words, how bitterly you will regret your expressions of to-day. But I do not wish to reproach you; it is our bad fortune, yours and mine, to be involved in a very painful situation, from which, perhaps, nothing but a rupture of the chain which unites us could extricate us. You have taken the initiative. You would leave me, and return to your aunt in Paris. So be it. Go!"

"Mr. Dalton!"

Something in his manner, in spite of her long-cherished prejudices against him, impresses and affects her, and she stretches out her hand, deprecatingly.

"Go, Ellinor! I, too, am weary of this long struggle; this long conflict with appearances, which, in spite of myself, condemn me. I am tired to the very heart of these perpetual appeals to your generosity and confidence—tired of trying to win the love of a woman who despises me."

"Mr. Dalton, if—if I have misconstrued"—she

says, with a tenderness unusual with her in addressing her husband.

"If you have misconstrued!" he exclaimed, passionately. "No, Ellinor, no! it is too late now for explanations; besides, I could give you none better than those you have already heard—too late for reconciliation; the breach has been slowly widening for three long years, and to-night I look at you across an impassable abyss, and wonder that I could have ever thought, as heaven knows I once did, of ultimately winning your love."

There are tears in his voice as he says these last words, and the emotion, so strange to the ordinary manner of the young barrister, affects Ellinor very much.

"Mr. Dalton! Henry!"

"You wish to go to Paris, Ellinor. You shall go! But the man who accompanies you thither must be Henry Dalton!"

"You will take me there?" she asks.

"Yes, and will place you under your aunt's protection. From that moment you are free of me forever. You will have about two hundred a year to live upon. It is not much out of the three thousand, is it?" he said, laughing bitterly; "but I give you my honor it is all I can afford, as I shall want the rest for myself." He looked at his watch. "A quarter past twelve," he said. Wrap yourself up warmly, Ellinor, it will be a cold journey. I will ring for the people to take your trunks down to the carriage."

"But Henry," she took his hand in hers; "Henry, something in your manner to-night makes me think that I have wronged you. I won't go to Paris. I will remain with you. I will trust you."

He pressed the little hand lying in his very gently, and said, looking at her gravely and sadly, with thoughtful blue eyes:

"You cannot, Ellinor! No, no, it is far better, believe me, as it is. I have borne the struggle for three years. I do not think that I could endure it for another day. Ellis?" he said, as the lady's maid entered the room in answer to his summons, "You will see that this letter is taken to Mr. Horace Margrave, immediately, and then look to these trunks being carried down-stairs. Now, Ellinor, if you are ready?"

She had muffled herself hurriedly in a large velvet cloak, while her maid brought her her bonnet, and arranged the things which she was too agitated to arrange herself.

She stopped in the hall, and said:

"I must say good-bye to Horace Margrave, and explain this change in our plans."

"My letter has done that, Ellinor. You will not speak one word to Horace Margrave while I am beneath this roof."

"As you will," she answers, submissively.

She has suddenly learned to submit to, if not to respect, her husband.

Henry Dalton is very silent during the short drive to the railway station, and when they alight he says:

"You would like to have Ellis with you, would you not?"

She assents, and her maid follows her into the carriage. It seems as if her husband were anxious to avoid a *tête-à-tête* with her.

Throughout the four hours' journey, Ellinor finds herself involuntarily watching the calm, grave face of her husband under the dim carriage lamp. It is impossible to read any emotion on that smooth, fair brow, or in those placid and thoughtful blue eyes; but she remembers the agitation in his voice as he spoke to her in her dressing-room.

"He is capable of some emotion," she thinks. "What if after all I should really have wronged him? If there should be some other key to this strange mystery than meanness and avarice? If he really love me, and I have misconstrued him, what a wretch he must think me!"

The next evening, after dark, they arrived in Paris; and Ellinor found herself, after an interval of nearly four years, once more in her aunt's little drawing-room in the Rue Saint Dominique. She was received with open arms. Henry Dalton smoothed over the singularity of her arrival, by saying that it was a visit of his own suggestion.

"Everything will explain itself at a future time, Ellinor; for the present, let ours be thought a temporary separation. I would not wish to alarm your poor aunt!"

"You shall have your own old bed-room, Ellinor," said her aunt. "Nothing has been disturbed since you left us. Look!" and she opened the door of a little apartment leading out of the drawing-room, in which ormolu clocks, looking-glasses and pink curtains very much preponderated over more substantial articles of furniture.

"But you are looking very ill, my dear child," she said, anxiously, as Ellinor pushed away the untasted plate of cold chicken which her aunt had persuaded her to try and eat. "You are really looking very ill, my dear Ellinor!"

"My journey has tired me a little, if you will excuse me, aunt. It is nearly eleven o'clock."

"Yes, and rest will do you more good than anything. Good-night, my darling child. Lisette—you remember Lisette—shall wait upon you exclusively, till your own maid gets accustomed to our foreign ways."

Wearied out with a night and day of incessant travelling, Ellinor slept soundly, and, waking the next morning, found her aunt seated by her bedside.

"My dear girl, you look a great deal better after your night's rest. Your husband would not disturb you to say 'Good-bye,' but has left this letter for you."

"Is Mr. Dalton gone?"

"Yes; he said he had most important business on the something, and a circuit," said her aunt vaguely; "but his letter will no doubt explain all. He has made every arrangement for your comfort during your stay with

me, my dear Ellinor. He seems a most devoted husband."

"He is very good," said Ellinor, with a sigh. Her aunt left her, and she opened the letter—opened it with an anxiety she could not repress. Her life had become so entirely changed in these few eventful days; and in spite of her indifference, nay, dislike to Henry Dalton, she felt helpless and unprotected now that she found herself abandoned by him. She could not refrain from hoping that this letter might contain some explanation of his conduct—some offer of reconciliation. But the letter was very brief, and did neither:—

"MY DEAR ELLINOR:—When you receive these few lines of farewell, I shall be on my way back to England. In complying with your wish, and restoring you to the home of your youth, I hope and believe that I have acted for the best. How much you have misunderstood me, how entirely you have mistaken my motives for the line of conduct which I have been compelled to adopt, you may never know. How much I have suffered from this terrible misunderstanding on your part, it would be impossible for me ever to tell you. But let this bitter past be forgotten; our roads in life henceforth lie entirely separate. Yet, if at any future hour you should ever come to need an adviser, or an earnest and disinterested friend, I must implore you to appeal to no one but—"
HENRY DALTON."

The letter fell from her hand, "Now—now I am indeed alone. What have I done," she said, "that I should have never been truly and sincerely beloved? The victim of a marriage of interest! It is very bitter. And the man—the only man I could have loved—no, no, the thought of his indifference is too painful."

CHAPTER VI.

HORACE MARGRAVE'S CONFESSION.

LIFE in the Faubourg St. Germain seemed very dreary to Ellinor after the brilliant London society to which she had been accustomed since her marriage. Her aunt's visiting list was very limited. Four or five old dowagers, who thought that the glory of the world had departed with the Bourbons; and that France, in the van of the great march of civilization, was foremost in a demoniac species of dance, leading only to destruction and the erection of a new guillotine upon the Place de la Revolution; two or three elderly but creditably preserved aristocrats of the ancient regime, whose political principles had stood still ever since 1783, and who something resembled ormolu clocks of that period, very much ornamented and embellished, but entirely powerless to tell the hour of the day; three or four very young ladies, educated in convents, and entirely uninterested in anything beyond M. Lamartine's poetry, and the manufacture of point lace; and one terrifically bearded and mustachioed gentleman, who had written a volume of poems, entitled "Clouds and Mists," but who had not yet been so fortunate as to meet with a publisher—this was about the extent of the visiting circle in the Rue St. Dominique; and for this circle Ellinor's aunt set apart a particular evening, on which she was visible, in conjunction with *café sucré*, rather weak coffee, and wafer biscuits.

The very first day of Ellinor's visit happened to be the day of her aunt's reception, and it seemed to her as if the tiresome hours would never wear themselves out, or the equally tiresome guests take their departure. She could not help remembering how different everything would have been had Horace Margrave been present. How he would have fought the battle of the *tiers état* with the white-headed old partisans of the departed noblesse; how he would have discussed and critically analyzed Lamartine's "Odes" with the young ladies from the convent; how he would have flattered the vanity of the bearded poet; and regretted the Bourbons with the faded old dowager. But he was away—gone out of her life, perhaps, entirely. "I shall never see him again," she said; "that dear and honorable guardian, in whose care my dead father left me."

The next day she went with her aunt to the Louvre, to see the improvements that had been made beneath the sway of that new ruler, who had already begun his work of regeneration in brick and mortar. The pictures only wearied her; the very coloring of the Rubens' seemed to have lost half its glowing beauty since she had last seen them; and Marie di Medici, florid and resplendent, bored her terribly. Many of the recent acquisitions she thought frightfully overrated, and she hurried her aunt away from the splendid exhibition before they had been there half an hour. She made a few purchases in the Palais Royal; and loitered for a little time at a milliner's, in the Rue de l'Echelle, discussing a new bonnet, and then declared herself thoroughly tired out with her morning's exertions.

She threw herself back in the carriage, and was very silent as they drove home; but suddenly, as they turned from the Rue de Rivoli into the open space between the Tuilleries and the Louvre, they passed close to a hackney coach, in which a gentleman was seated, and Ellinor, starting up, cried out: "Aunt! my guardian, Mr. Margrave. Did you not see him? He has just this moment passed us in a hackney coach."

She pulled the check-string violently as she spoke, and her aunt's coachman stopped; but Horace Margrave was out of sight, and the vehicle in which he was seated lost among the crowd of carriages of the same description, rattling up and down the bustling street.

"Never mind, my dear Ellinor," said her aunt, as Ellinor, letting down the carriage window, looked eagerly out; "if you are not mistaken in the face of the person who passed us, and it really is Horace Margrave, he is sure to call on us immediately."

"Mistaken in my guardian's face! No, indeed. But of course he will call, as you say, aunt."

"Yes; he will call this evening, most likely. He knows how seldom I go out."

"What can have brought him to Paris?" thought El

Ellinor. "I know he would rather shun me than seek me out; for, since the coolness between me and my husband, he has always seemed to avoid me; so I can have nothing to do with this visit. But surely he will call this evening."

All that evening and all the next morning she constantly expected to hear the lawyer's name announced, but still he did not come. "He had important business to transact yesterday, perhaps," she thought, "and he may be employed this morning; but in the evening he is sure to call."

After dinner she sat by the low wood fire in her aunt's little drawing-room, turning over the leaves of a book which she had vainly endeavored to read, and looking every moment at the tiny buhl clock over the chimney; but the evening slowly dragged itself through, and still no Horace Margrave. She expected him on the following day, but again only to be disappointed; and in this manner the week passed, without her hearing any tidings of him.

"He must have left Paris!" she thought; "left Paris without once calling here to see me. Nothing could better testify his utter indifference," she added, bitterly. "It was no doubt only for my father's sake that he ever pretended any interest in the friendless orphan girl."

The following week, Ellinor went with her aunt once or twice to the Opera, and to two or three reunions in the Faubourg, at which her handsome face and elegant manners made some sensation; but still no Horace Margrave. "If he had been in Paris, we should have seen him, most likely, at the Opera," thought Ellinor.

That week elapsed, and on the Sunday evening Ellinor Dalton sat alone in her own room, writing a packet of letters to some friends in England, when she was interrupted by a summons from her aunt. Some one wanted her in the drawing-room immediately.

Some one in the drawing-room, who wanted to see her? Could it be her guardian at last?

"A lady or a gentleman?" she asked of the servant who brought her aunt's message.

"A lady—a sister of mercy."

She hurried into the drawing-room, and found, as the servant had told her, a sister of mercy in conversation with her aunt.

"My dear Ellinor, this lady wishes you to accompany her on a visit to a sick person; a person whom you know, but whose name she is forbidden to reveal. What can this mystery mean?"

"A sick person, who wishes to see me?" said Ellinor. "But I know so few people in Paris; no one likely to send for me."

"If you can trust me, madame," said the sister of mercy, "and if you will accompany me on my visit to this person, I believe your presence will be of great service. The mind of the invalid is, I regret to say, in a very disturbed state, and you only, I imagine, will be able, under heaven and the church, to give relief to that."

"I will come," said Mrs. Dalton.

"But Ellinor!"—exclaimed her aunt, anxiously.

"If I can be of any service, my dear aunt, it would be most cruel, most cowardly, to refuse to go."

"But, my dear child, when you do not know the person to whom you are going."

"I will trust this lady," answered Ellinor, "and I will go. I will throw on my bonnet and shawl, and join you, madame," she added to the sister of mercy, as she hurried from the apartment.

"When these girls once get married, there's no managing them," murmured Ellinor's aunt, as she folded her thin white hands, bedecked with a great many old-fashioned rings, resignedly, one over the other. "Pray do not let them detain her long," she continued aloud, to the sister of mercy, who sat looking gravely into the few embers in the little English grate. "I shall suffer the most excruciating anxiety till I see her safe home again."

"She will be perfectly safe with me, madame."

"Now, madame, I am quite at your service," said Ellinor, re-entering.

In a few moments they were seated in a hackney coach, and rattling through the quiet Faubourg.

"Are we going far?" asked Ellinor of her companion.

"To Maurice's Hotel."

"To Maurice's? Then the person I am going to see is not a resident in Paris?"

"No, madame."

Who could it be? Not a resident in Paris. Some one from England, no doubt. Who could it be? Her husband, or Horace Margrave? These were the only two persons who presented themselves to her mind; but in either case, why this mystery?

They reached the hotel, and the sister of mercy herself led the way up stairs into an inclosed hall on the third story, where she stopped suddenly at the door of a small sitting-room, which she entered, followed by Ellinor.

Two gentlemen, evidently physicians, stood talking in whispers in the embrasure of the window. One of them looked up at seeing the two women enter, and to him the sister of mercy said.

"Your patient, Monsieur Delville?"

"He is quieter, Louise. The delirium has subsided; he is now quite sensible, but very much exhausted," replied the physician. "Is this the lady?" he added, looking at Ellinor.

"Yes, Monsieur Delville."

"Madame," said the doctor, "will you favor me with a few moments' conversation?"

"With pleasure, monsieur. But first, let me implore you, one word. This sick person, for mercy's sake, tell me his name?"

"That I cannot do, madame; his name is unknown to me."

"But the people in the hotel?"

"Are also ignorant of it. His portmanteau has no

address. He came most probably on a flying visit; but he has been detained here by a very alarming illness."

"Then let me see him, monsieur. I cannot endure this suspense. I have reason to suppose that this gentleman is a friend who is very dear to me. Let me see him, and then I shall know the worst."

"You shall see him, madame, in ten minutes. Monsieur Lerule, will you prepare the patient for an interview with this lady?"

The other doctor bowed gravely, and opened a door leading into an inner apartment, which he entered, closing the door carefully behind him.

"Madame," said Monsieur Delville, "I was called in, only three days ago, to see the person lying in the next room. My colleague had been for some time attending him through a very difficult case of typhus fever. A few days ago the case became still more complicated and difficult, by an affection of the brain which supervened, and Monsieur Lerule, not feeling himself strong enough to combat these difficulties, considered it his duty to call in another physician. I was, therefore, summoned. I found the case, as my colleague had found it, a most extraordinary one. There was not only physical weakness to combat, but mental depression—mental depression of so terrible and gloomy a character, that both Monsieur Lerule and myself feared that should we even succeed in preserving the life of the patient, we might fail in saving his reason."

"How terrible! how terrible!" said Ellinor.

"During the three days and nights in which I have attended him," continued the doctor, "we have not succeeded until this evening in obtaining an interval of consciousness; but throughout the delirium our patient has perpetually dwelt upon two or three subjects, which, though of a different character, may be by some chain of circumstances connected into the one source of his great mental wretchedness. Throughout his wanderings one name has been incessantly upon his lips."

"And that name is—?"

"Ellinor Dalton!"

"My own name!"

"Yes, madame, your name, coupled with perpetual entreaties for pardon; for forgiveness of a great wrong—a wrong done long since—and scrupulously concealed."

"A wrong done! If this is the person I suspect it to be, he never, never was anything but the truest friend to me; but, for pity's sake, let me see him. This torture of suspense is killing me."

"One moment, madame. I had some difficulty in finding you, but mentioning everywhere the name of the lady of whom I was in search, I fortunately happened to make the inquiry of a friend of your aunt's. This good, devoted Louise, here, was ready to set out on her errand of mercy, and I thought that you might feel, perhaps, more confidence in her than in me."

At this moment, the door of communication between the two apartments was softly opened, and the other doctor entered.

"I have prepared the patient for your visit, madame," he said; "but you must guard against a shock to your own feelings in seeing him. He is very ill."

"In danger?" asked Ellinor.

"Unhappily, yes—in very great danger!"

"Throughout the brief interview with the physician, Ellinor Dalton had said to herself: "Whatever it is that must be endured by me, I will bear it bravely—for his sake I will bear it bravely." Her handsome face was white as death—the firm, thin lips rigidly locked over the closely-shut teeth—the dark and mournful gray eyes tearless and serene; but her heart knocked against her breast so loudly, that she seemed to hear the heavy throb of its every pulsation in the stillness of the room.

Her worst presentiments were realized.

Horace Margrave lay with his head thrown back upon the piled-up pillows, and his attenuated hand stretched listlessly upon the elder-down counterpane which was wrapped about him. His head was bound with wet linen, over which his nurse had tied a handkerchief of scarlet, whose vivid hue made his white face seem by the contrast still more ghastly. His dark brown eyes had lost the dreamy expression usual to them, and had the bright and feverish lustre of disease. They were fixed, with a haggard and earnest gaze, upon the door through which Ellinor entered.

"At last!" he cried, with an hysterical cry. "At last!"

She pressed her hand tightly over her beating heart, and, falling on her knees by his bedside, said to him, very quietly:

"Horace—Horace! what is this? Why—why do I find you thus?"

He fixed his great lustrous eyes upon her, as he answered:

"What is it, Ellinor? Shall I tell you?"

"Yes—yes! if you can tell me without unnerving yourself."

"Unnerving myself!" He laughed, with a bitter, unnatural cadence. "Unnerv myself—look at that!" He stretched out one thin, half-transparent hand, which trembled like an aspen leaf, until he let it fall listlessly upon the quilt. "For four years, Ellinor, I have been slowly burning out my life in one long nervous fever; and you tell me not to unnerve myself."

He gave me a restless, impatient sigh, and, tossing his weary head back upon the pillow, turned his face to the wall.

Ellinor Dalton looked round the room in which this brilliant, all-accomplished, admired, and fascinating Horace Margrave had lain for eleven dreary days—eleven dreary nights.

It was a small apartment, comfortably furnished, and heated by a stove. On the table by the bedside a Book of Hours lay open, with a rosary thrown across the page where the reader had left off. Near this was an English Testament, also lying open. The sister of mercy who had been nursing Horace Margrave had procured this Testament in his own language, in hopes that he would

be induced to read it. But the sick man, when sensible spoke to her in French; and when she implored him to see a priest, refused, with an impatient gesture, which he repeated when she spoke to him of a Protestant clergyman, whom she knew, and could summon to him.

The dim lamp was shaded from the eyes of the invalid by a white porcelain screen, which subdued the light, and cast great shadows of the furniture upon the walls of the room.

He lay for some time quite quietly, with his face still turned away from Ellinor, but by the incessant nervous motion of the hand lying upon the counterpane, she knew that he was not asleep.

The doctor opened the door softly, and looked in.

"If he says anything to you," he whispered to Ellinor, "hear it quietly; but do not ask him any questions; and, above all, do not betray agitation."

She bowed her head in assent, and the physician closed the door.

Suddenly Horace Margrave turned his face to her, and looking at her earnestly with his haggard eyes, said:

"Ellinor Dalton, you ask me what this means. I will tell you. The very day on which you left England, a strange chance led me into the heart of a manufacturing town—a town which was being ravaged by the fearful scourge of an infectious fever; I was in a very weak state of health, and, as might be expected, I caught this fever. I was warned, when it was perhaps not yet too late to have taken precautions which might have saved me, but I would not take those precautions. I was too great a coward to commit suicide. Some people say a man is too brave to kill himself—I was not—but I was too much a coward. Life was hateful, but I was afraid to die. Yet I would not avert a danger which had not been my own seeking. Let the fever kill me, if it would, Ellinor, my wish is fast being accomplished. I am dying."

"Horace! Horace!" She fell on her knees once more at the side of the bed, and taking the thin hand in hers, pressed it to her lips.

He drew it away as if he had been stung. "For heaven's sake, Ellinor, if you have any pity—no tenderness! That I cannot bear. For four years you have never seen me without a mask. I am going to let it fall. You will curse me, you will hate me soon, Ellinor Dalton!"

"Hate you, Horace—never!"

He waved his hand impatiently, as if to wave away protestations that must soon be falsified.

"Wait," he said; "you do not know." Then, after a brief pause, he continued—"Ellinor, I have not been the kindest or the tenderest of guardians, have I, to my beautiful young ward? You reproached me with my cold indifference one day soon after your marriage, in the little drawing-room in Hertford-street."

"You remember that?"

"I remember that! Ellinor, you never spoke one word to me in your life which I do not remember; as well as the accent in which it was spoken, and the place where I heard it. I say, I have not been a kind or affectionate guardian—have I, Ellinor?"

"You were so once, Horace," she said.

"I was so once! When, Ellinor?"

"Before my uncle left me that wretched fortune."

"That wretched fortune—yes, that divided us at once and forever. Ellinor, there were two reasons for this pitiful comedy of cold indifference. Can you guess one of them?"

"No," she answered.

"You cannot? I affected an indifference I did not feel, or pretended an apathy which was a lie from first to last, because, Ellinor Dalton, I loved you with the whole strength of my heart and soul, from the first to the last."

"Oh, Horace! Horace! for pity's sake!" She stretched out her hands imploringly, as if she would prevent the utterance of the words which seemed to break her heart.

"Ellinor, when you were seventeen years' of age, you had no thought of succeeding to your uncle's property. It would have been, upon the whole, a much more natural thing for him to have left it to his adopted son, Henry Dalton. Your poor father expected that he would do so; I expected the same. Your father intrusted me with the custody of your little income, and I discharged my trust honestly. I was a great speculator; I dabbled with thousands, and cast down heavy sums every day, as a gambler throws down a card upon the gaming-table; and to me your mother's little fortune was so insignificant a trust, that its management never gave me a moment's thought or concern. At this time I was going on in a fair way to become a rich man; in fact, was a rich man; and, Ellinor, I was an honorable man. I loved you—loved you as I never believed I could love—my innocent and beautiful ward; how could it well be otherwise? I am not a coxcomb, Ellinor; and if there is one character I hold more in contempt than another, it is that of a lady-killer; but I dared to say to myself—'I love, and am beloved again.' Those dark and deep gray eyes, Ellinor, had told me the secret of a young and confiding heart; and I thought myself more than happy—only too deeply blest. Oh, Ellinor! Ellinor! if I had spoken then."

Her head was buried in her hands, as she knelt by his pillow, and she was sobbing aloud.

"There was, time enough, I said. This, Ellinor, was the happiest period of my life. Do you remember our quiet evenings in the Rue St. Dominique, when I left business and business cares behind me in Verulam Buildings, and ran over here to spend a week in my young ward's society? Do you remember the books we read together? Good heavens! there is a page in Lamartine's 'Odes,' which I can see before me as I speak! I can see the lights and shadows which I taught you to put under the cupola of a church in Munich, which you once painted in water-colors. I can recall every thought, every word, every pleasure, and every emotion of that sweet and tranquil time, in which I hoped and believed that you, Ellinor, would be my wife."

She lifted her face, all blinded and blotted by her tears, and looking at him for one brief instant, let it fall again upon her hands.

"Your uncle died, Ellinor, and the fair elevation of this palace of my life, which I had built with such confidence, was shivered to the ground. The fortune was left to you on condition that you married Henry Dalton. Women are ambitious. You would never surely resign such a fortune. You would marry young Dalton. This was the lawyer's answer to the all-important question. But those tender gray eyes, looking up from under their veil of inky lashes, had told a sweet secret, and perhaps your generous heart might count this fortune a very small thing to fling away for the sake of the man you loved. This was the lover's answer, and I hoped still, Ellinor, to win my darling. You were not to be made acquainted with the conditions of your uncle's will until you attained your majority. You were, at the time of his death, barely twenty years of age; there was, then, an entire year in which you would remain ignorant of the penalties attached to this unexpected wealth. In the meantime, I, as sole executor (your uncle, you see, trusted me most entirely,) had the custody of the funded property John Arden, of Arden, had left.

"I have told you, Ellinor, that I was a speculator. My profession threw me in the way of speculation. Confident in the power of my own intellect, I staked my fortune on the wonderful hazards of the year 1846. I doubled that fortune, trebled, quadrupled it, and, when it had grown to be four times its original bulk, I staked it again. It was out of my hands, but it was invested in, as I thought, so safe a speculation, that it was as secure as if it had never left my bankers. The railway company of which I was a director was one of the richest and most flourishing in England. My own fortune, as I have told you, was entirely invested, and was doubling itself rapidly. As your uncle's trustee, as your devoted friend, your interests were dearer to me than my own. Why should I not speculate with your fortune, double it, and then say to you, 'See, Ellinor, here are two fortunes, of which you are the mistress; one you owe to Henry Dalton, under the conditions of your uncle's will; the other is yours alone. You are rich you are free, without any sacrifice, to marry the man you love; and this, Ellinor, is my work?' This was what I thought to have said to you at the close of the great year of speculation, 1846."

"Oh, Horace, Horace! I see it all. Spare yourself, spare me! Do not tell me any more."

"Spare myself! No, Ellinor, not one pang, not one heart-break. I deserve it all. You were right in what you said in the boudoir at Sir Lionel's. The money was not my own; no sophistry, no ingenious twisting of facts and forcing of conclusions, could ever make it mine. How do I know even now that your interest was really my only motive in the step I took? How do I know that it was not, indeed, the gambler's guilty madness only, which impelled me to my crime? How do I know? How do I know? Enough! the crash came; my fortune and yours were together engulfed in the vast destruction; and I, the trusted friend of your dead father, the conscientious lawyer, whose name had become a synonym for honor and honesty; I, Horace Welmoden Margrave, only lineal descendant of the royalist, Captain Margrave, who perished at Worcester, fighting for his king and the honor of his noble race; I, Ellinor, was a cheat and a swindler—a dishonest and dishonorable man!"

"Dishonorable, Horace! No, no; only mistaken."

"Mistaken, Ellinor? Yes, that is one of the words invented by dishonest men, to slur over their dishonesty. The fraudulent banker in whose ruin the fate of thousands, who have trusted him and believed in him, is involved, is, after all, as his friends say, only mistaken. The clerk, who robs his employer in the insane hope of restoring what he has abstracted, is, as his counsel pleads to a soft-hearted jury, with sons of their own, only mistaken! The speculator, who plays the great game of commercial hazard with another man's money, he, too, dares to look at the world with a pitiful face, and cry, 'Alas! I was only mistaken!' No, Ellinor, I have never put in that plea. From the moment of that terrible crash, which shattered my whole life into ruin and desolation, I have, at least, tried to look my fate in the face. But I have not borne all my own burdens, Ellinor. The heaviest weight of my crime has fallen upon the innocent shoulders of Henry Dalton."

"Henry Dalton, my husband?"

"Yes, Ellinor, your husband, Henry Dalton, the truest, noblest, most honorable, and most conscientious of men."

"You praise him so much," she said, rather bitterly.

"Yes, Ellinor, I am weak enough and wicked enough to feel a cruel pain in being compelled to do so; it is the last poor duty I can do him. Heaven knows I have done him enough injury!"

The exertion of talking for so long a time had completely exhausted him, and he fell back, half fainting, upon the pillows. The sister of mercy, summoned from the next apartment by Ellinor, administered a restorative to him; and, in low, broken accents, he continued:

"From the moment of my ruin, Ellinor, I felt and knew that you were forever lost to me. I could bear this; I did not think my life would be a long one; it had been hitherto lit by no star of hope, shone upon by no sunlight of love. *Vogue la galère!* Let it go on its own dark way to the end. I say, I could bear this, but I could not bear the thought of your contempt; your aversion; that was too bitter. I could not come to you, and say, 'I love you; I have always loved you; I love you as I never before loved, as I never hoped to love; but I am a swindler and a cheat, and you can never be mine.' No, Ellinor, I could not do this; and yet you were on the eve of coming of age. Some step must be taken, and the only thing that could save me from this alternative was the generosity of Henry Dalton."

"I had heard a great deal of your uncle's adopted son, and I had met him very often at Arden; I knew him to be as noble and true hearted a man as ever breathed the breath of human life. I determined, therefore, to throw myself upon his generosity, and to reveal all. 'He will despise me, but I can bear his contempt better than the scorn of the woman I loved.' I said this to myself, and one night—the night after Henry Dalton had first seen you, and had been deeply fascinated with the radiant beauty of my lovely ward, that very night after the day on which you came of age—I took Henry Dalton into my chambers in Verulam Buildings, and, after binding him with an oath of the most implicit secrecy, I told him all."

"You now understand the cruel position in which Henry Dalton was placed. The fortune, which he was supposed to possess on marrying you, never existed. You were penniless, except, indeed, for the hundred a year coming to you from your mother's property. His solemn oath forbade him to reveal this to you; and for three years he endured your contempt, and was silent. Judge now of the wrong I have done him! Judge now the noble heart which you have trampled upon and tortured!"

"Oh, Horace! Horace! what misery this money has brought upon us!"

"No, Ellinor. What misery one deviation from the straight line of honor has brought upon us! Ellinor, dearest, only beloved, can you forgive the man who has so truly loved, yet so deeply injured you?"

"Forgive you!"

She rose from her knees, and smoothing the thick, dark hair from his white forehead, with tender, pitying hands, looked him full in the face.

"Horace," she said, "when, long ago, you thought I loved you, you read my heart aright; but the depth and truth of that love you could never read. Now, now that I am the wife of another, another to whom I owe so very much affection in reparation of the wrong I have done him, I dare tell you without a thought which is a sin against him, how much I loved you—and you ask me if I can forgive! As freely as I would have resigned this money for your sake, can I forgive you for the loss of it. This confession has set all right. I will be a good wife to Henry Dalton, and you and he may be sincere friends yet."

"What, Ellinor, do you think that, did I not know myself to be dying, I could have made this confession? No, you see me now under the influence of stimulants which give me a false strength; of excitement, which is strong enough to master even death. To-morrow night, Ellinor, the doctors tell me, there will no longer be in this weary world a weak, vacillating, dishonorable wretch called Horace Margrave."

He stretched out his attenuated hands, drew her towards him, and imprinted one kiss upon her forehead.

"The first and the last, Ellinor," he said. "Good-by."

His face changed to a deadlier white than before, and he fell back, fainting.

The physician, peeping in at the half-open door, beckoned to Ellinor:

"You must leave him at once, my dear madame," he said. "Had I not seen the dreadfully disturbed state of his mind, I should never have permitted this interview."

"Oh, monsieur, tell me, can you save him?"

"Only by a miracle, madame. A miracle far beyond medical skill."

"You yourself, then, have no hope?"

"Not a shadow of hope."

She bowed her head. The physician took her hand in his, and pressed it with a fatherly tenderness, looking at her earnestly and mournfully.

"Send for me to-morrow," she said, imploringly.

"Your presence can only endanger him, madame; but I will send you tidings of his state. Adieu!"

She bent her head once more, and without uttering another word, hurried from the room.

The following morning, as she was seated in her own apartment, she was once more summoned into the drawing-room.

The sister of mercy was there, talking to her aunt. They both looked grave and thoughtful, and glanced anxiously at Ellinor, as she entered the room.

"He is worse?" said Ellinor to the sister, before a word had been spoken.

"Unhappily, yes. Madame, he is"—

"Oh, do not tell me any more! For pity's sake!" she exclaimed. "So young, so gifted, so admired; and it was in this very room we passed such happy hours together, years ago."

She walked with tearless eyes to the window, and, leaning her head against the glass, looked down into the street below, and out at the cheerless gray of the autumn sky.

She was thinking how new and strange the world looked to her now that Horace Margrave was dead!

They erected a very modest tomb over the remains of Horace Margrave, in the Cemetery of Pere la Chaise. There had been some thoughts of conveying his ashes in his native country, that they might rest in the church of Margrave, a little village in Westmoreland, the chancel of which church was decorated with a recumbent statue of Algernon Margrave, cavalier, who fell at Worcester fight; but as he, the deceased, had no nearer relations than a few second cousins in the army and the church, and a superannuated admiral, his great uncle, and, as it is furthermore discovered that the accomplished solicitor of Verulam Buildings, Gray's Inn, had left not a penny behind him, the idea was quickly abandoned, and the last remains of the admired Horace were left to decay in the soil of a foreign grave.

It was never fully known who caused the simple tablet which ultimately adorned his resting-place to be erected. It was a plain block of marble; no pompous

Latin epitaph, or long list of virtues, was thereon engraved; but a half-burned torch, suddenly extinguished, was sculptured at the bottom of the tablet, while, from the smoke of the torch, a butterfly mounted upwards. Above this design there was merely inscribed the name and age of the deceased.

The night following the day of Horace Margrave's funeral, Henry Dalton was seated, hard at work, at his chambers in the Temple.

The light of the office lamp falling upon his quiet face, revealed a mournful and careworn expression not usual to him.

He looked ten years older since his marriage to Ellinor.

He had fought the battle of life, and lost—lost in that great battle which some hold so lightly, but which to others is an earnest fight—lost in the endeavor to win the wife he could so tenderly and truly have loved.

He had now nothing left to him but his profession—no other ambition—no other hope.

"I will work hard," he said, "that she, though separated from me forever, may still at least derive every joy, of those poor joys which money can buy, from my labor."

He had heard nothing of either Horace Margrave's journey to Paris, his illness, or his death. He had no hope of being ever released from the oath which bound him to silence—to silence, which he had sworn to preserve so long as Horace Margrave lived.

Tired, but still persevering, and absorbed in a difficult case, which needed all the professional acumen of the clever young barrister, he read and wrote on until past eleven o'clock.

Just as the clocks were chiming the half hour after eleven, he heard the bell of the outer door ring, as if pulled by an agitated hand.

His chambers were on the first floor; on the floor below were those of a gentleman who always left at six o'clock.

"I do not expect anyone at such an hour; but it may be for me," he thought.

He heard his clerk open the door, and went on writing without once lifting his head.

Three minutes afterwards the door of his own office opened, and a person entered unannounced. He looked up suddenly. A lady dressed in mourning, with her face entirely concealed by a thick veil, stood near the door.

"Madame," he said, with some surprise, "may I ask"—

She came hurriedly from the door by which she stood and fell on her knees at his feet, throwing up her veil as she did so.

"Ellinor!"

"Yes. I am in mourning for Horace Margrave, my unhappy guardian. He died a week ago in Paris. He told me all. Henry Dalton, my friend, my husband, my benefactor, can you forgive me?"

He passed his hand rapidly across his eyes, and turned his face away from her.

Presently he raised her in his arms, and, drawing her to his breast, said in a broken voice:

"Ellinor, I have suffered so long and so bitterly that I can scarcely bear this great emotion. My dearest, my darling, my adored and beloved wife, are we, indeed, at last set free from the terrible secret which has had such a cruel influence on our lives. Horace Margrave!"

"Is dead, Henry! I once loved him very dearly. I freely forgave him the injury he did me. Tell me that you forgive him too."

"From my inmost heart, Ellinor!"

[THE END.]

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